MARGARITA'S SOUL

by

INGRAHAM LOVELL

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Josephine Brown Dodge '70

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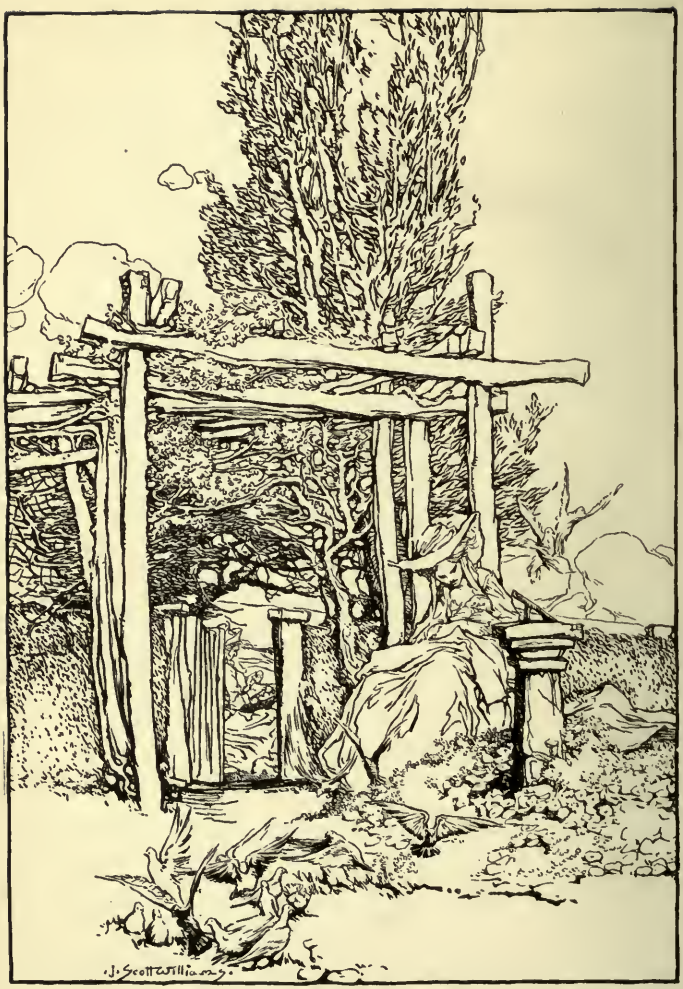
MARGARITA'S SOUL



THEY CROONED TOGETHER THERE, THE WOMAN, THE CHILD AND THE BIRDS

MARGARITA'S SOUL

THE ROMANTIC RECOLLECTIONS
OF A MAN OF FIFTY

By
INGRAHAM LOVELL

With Illustrations by J. Scott Williams
And Whistler Butterfly Decorations

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
MCMIX

1909

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Publishers Printing Company, New York

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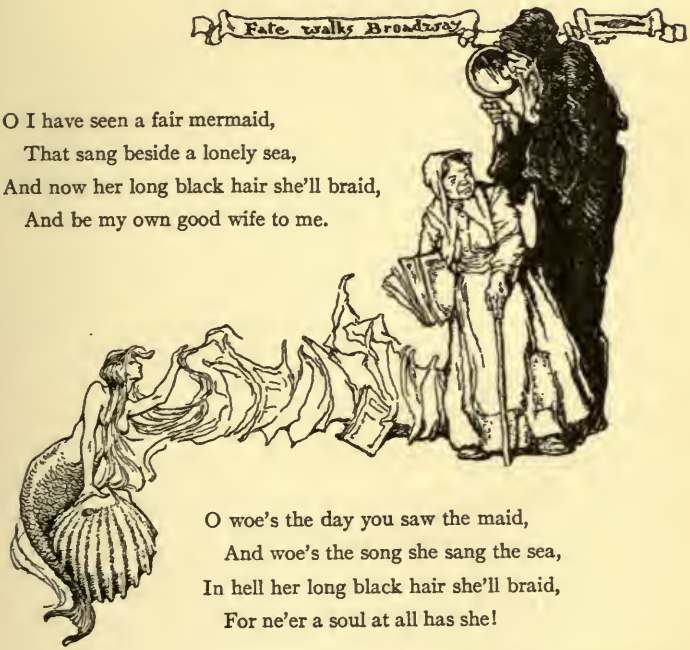
PART ONE

IN WHICH YOU SEE A SECRET SPRING



O I have seen a fair mermaid,
That sang beside a lonely sea,
And now her long black hair she'll braid,
And be my own good wife to me.

O woe's the day you saw the maid,
And woe's the song she sang the sea,
In hell her long black hair she'll braid,
For ne'er a soul at all has she!

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

MARGARITA'S SOUL

CHAPTER I

FATE WALKS BROADWAY

ROGER BRADLEY was walking up Broadway. This fact calls sharply for comment, for he had not done it in years; the thoroughfare was intolerable to him. But one of its impingements upon a less blatant avenue had caught him napping and he found himself entangled in a mesh of theatre dribblings, pool-room loungers, wine-touts and homeward bent women of the middle, shopping class. Being there, he scorned to avail himself of the regularly recurring cross streets, but strode along, his straight, trim bulk, his keen, judicial profile—a profile that spoke strong of the best traditions of American blood—marking him for what he was among a crowd not to be matched, in its way, upon the Western Continent.

At the second slanting of the great, tawdry lane he bent with it and encountered suddenly a little knot of flustered women just descended from the elevated way that doubled the din and blare of the shrieking city. They were bundle-filled, voluble, dressed by any standards save those of their native city, far beyond their probable means and undoubted station. As they stopped unexpectedly and hesitated, damming the flood of hurrying citizens, Roger halted of necessity and stepped backward, but in avoiding them he bumped heavily against the person behind him. A startled gasp, something soft against his shoulder, the sharp edge of a

projecting hat, told him that this person was a woman, and stepping sidewise into the shelter of a neighbouring news-stall, he raised his hat with a courtesy alien to the place and hour.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, "I trust I have not hurt you?"

"No," said the woman, who wore a heavy grey veil, and as that is literally all she said and as her method of saying it was as convincing as it was simple, one would suppose the incident closed and look to see Roger complete his journey to his club without further adventure.

Do I wish he had? God knows. It was undoubtedly the turning-point in his life and he was forty. Had he gone on to the club where I was waiting for him; had we dined, played out our rubber, dropped in at the occasional chamber concert that was our usual and almost our only dissipation in those days, I should not now be ransacking old letters and diaries from which to make this book, nor would Margarita's picture—her loveliest, as *Juliet*—lean toward me from the wall. She is smiling; not as one smiles in photographs, but as a flesh-and-blood woman droops over the man she loves and smiles her heart into his lips, reaching over his shoulder. Everything slips behind but you two, herself and you, when you look at it. Sarony, who took it, told me he had never posed such a subject, and I believe him.

Well, well, it's done now. It was twenty years ago that Roger bumped into his fate in that eddy of Broadway and I was as powerless as you are now to disentangle him and keep him for myself, which, selfishly enough, of course, I wanted terribly to do. You see, he was all I had, Roger, and I was hoping we would play the game out together. But—not to have known Margarita? Never to have watched that bending droop of her neck, that extraordinary colouring of her skin—a real Henner skin! I remember Maurice Grau's telling me that he had always thought Henner colour blind till he saw Margarita's neck in her name-part in *Faust*.

The things that girl used to tell me, before she had any soul, of course, and in the days when I was the third man to whom she had ever spoken more than ten words in her life, were almost enough to pay for all the pain she taught me. Such talks! I can close my eyes and actually smell the sea-weed and the damp sand and hear the inrush of the big combers. She used to sit in the lee of the rocks, all huddled in that heavy, supple army-blue officer's cloak of hers with its tarnished silver clasps, and talk as Miranda must have talked to Ferdinand's old bachelor friend, who probably appreciated the chance—too well, the poor old dog!

I had reached, I think, when I left off my plain unvarnished tale and took to maundering, that precise point in it which exhibits Roger in the act of replacing his hat upon his even then slightly greyish head and striding on. It seems to me that he would not have checked in his stride if the woman had replied after the usual tautological fashion of her sex (we blame them for it, not thinking how wholly in nature it is that they should be so, like the repeated notes of birds, the persistence of the raindrops, the continual flicker of the sun through the always fluttering leaves,) with some such phrase as, "No, indeed, not in the least, I assure you!" or "Not at all, really—don't mention it!" or even, "No, indeed," with a shy bow or a composed one, as the case might be. But this woman uttered merely the syllable, "No," with no modification nor variation, no inclination of the head, no movement forward or back. Her utterance was grave, moreover, and precise; her tone noticeably full and deep. Roger, pausing a moment in the shelter of the news-stall, spoke again at the spur of some unexplainable impulse.

"I was afraid I had stepped directly on your foot—it felt so," he said.

Again she answered simply, "No," and that was his second chance. Now in the face of these facts it is folly to contend that the woman "accosted" him, as his cousin, who was one of the

Boston Thayers, put it to me. She did nothing of the kind; she replied twice, to his distinct questions, in the coldest of monosyllables and he could not even have told if she looked at him, her veil was so thick. Let that be definitely understood, once and for all. The chances were even in favour of her being violently pitted from the small-pox, since even twenty years ago, when the city was less cosmopolitan (and from my point of view more interesting) the women of New York of the class that travels unaccompanied and on foot at dusk were not accustomed to go heavily veiled if they had any fair excuse for the contrary course.

Nevertheless to that veiled woman did Roger address himself—unnecessarily, mark you—for the third time. Why did he? He had his chance; two chances in fact. But this is folly, for of course he had no chance at all. Fate stood by that news-stall, with the blear-eyed, frousy woman that tended it looking vacantly on; Fate, veiled, too, and not even monosyllabic in his behalf. I should have known this, I think, even if I had not lived those curious, long eight months in Algeria and slept those dreamless nights under the Algerian stars that got into my blood and call me back now and then; imperiously and never in vain, though I feel older than the stars, and Alif and the rest are dead or exhibiting themselves at the great American memorial fairs that began to flourish about the time this tale begins. No, there was no help: it was written.

"I am glad I did not hurt you," he said, really moving forward now and again raising his hat, "these crowds are dangerous for women at this hour."

He took two steps and stopped suddenly, for a hand slipped under his arm. (You should have seen his cousin's face, the Boston one, when in that relentless way known only to women and eminent artists in cross-examination she got this fact out of me.)

"Will you tell me the quickest way to Broadway?" said the woman to whom he had just spoken.

"To Broadway?" he echoed stupidly, standing stock still, conscious of the grasp upon his arm, a curious sense of the importance of this apparently cheap experience surging over him, even while he resented its banality. "This is Broadway. What do you want of it?"

"I want to show myself on it," said the woman, a young woman, from the voice.

Roger stepped back against the news-stall, dragging her with him, since her hand did not leave his arm.

"To show yourself on it?" he repeated sternly, "and why do you want to do that?"

"To get myself some friends. I have none," said she serenely.

Now you must not think Roger a fool, for he was not. You see, you never heard the voice that spoke to him. If you had, and had possessed any experience or knowledge of the world, you would have realised that the owner of that voice possessed neither or else was a very great and convincing actress. Mere print cannot excuse him, perhaps, but I give you my word he was as a matter of fact excusable, since he was a bachelor. Most men are very susceptible to the human voice, especially to the female human voice, and it has always been a matter of the deepest wonder to me that the men who do not hear a lovely one once in the year are most under the dominion of their females. I mean, of course, the Americans. It is one of the greatest proofs of the power of these *belles Americaines* that they wield it in spite of the rustiness of this, their chief national weapon.

The bell notes, the grave, full richness of this veiled woman's voice touched Roger deeply and with a brusque motion he drew out from his pocket a banknote and pressed it into the hand under his arm.

"Take this and go home," he said severely. "If you will promise me to call at an address I will give you, I will guarantee you a decent means of livelihood. Will you promise me?"

She reached down without a word into a bag that hung *en chatelaine* at her waist and drew out something in her turn.

"I have a great many of those," she said placidly, "and more at home. See them!"

And under his face she thrust a double handful of stamped paper—all green.

"Each one of these is called twenty dollars," she informed him, "and some of them are called fifty dollars. They are in the bottom of the bag. I do not think that I need any more."

Roger stared at her.

"Put that away directly," he said, "and lift your veil so that I can see who you are. There is something wrong here."

They stood in the lee of the flaring stall, a pair so obvious in their relation to each other, one would say, as to require no comment beyond the cynical indifference of the red-eyed woman who tended it. No doubt she had long ceased to count the well-dressed, athletic men who drew indifferently clothed young women into the shelter of her stand. And yet no one of his Puritan ancestors could have been further in spirit from her dreary inferences than this Roger. Nor do I believe him to be so exceptional in this as to cause remark. We are not all birds of prey, dear ladies, believe me. Indeed, since you have undertaken the responsibilities of the literary dissecting-room so thoroughly and increasingly; since you have, as one might say, at last freed your minds to us in the amazing frankness of your multitudinous and unsparing pages, I am greatly tempted to wonder if you are not essentially less decent than we. One would never have ventured to suspect it, had you not opened the door. . . .

The woman threw back her veil so that it framed her face like a cloud and Roger looked straight into her eyes. And so the curtain rolled up, the orchestra ceased its irrelevant pipings and the play was begun.

CHAPTER II

FATE GOES A-FISHING

Roger told me afterward that he literally could not say if it were five seconds or five minutes that he looked into the girl's eyes. He has since leaned to the opinion that it was nearer five minutes, because even the news-woman stared at him and the passing street boys had already begun to collect. Some subconscious realisation of this finally enabled him to drag his eyes away, very much as one drags himself awake when he must, and to realise the picture he presented—a dazed man confronting an extraordinarily lovely girl with her fist full of banknotes on a Broadway kerbstone. An interested cabby caught his eye, wagged his whip masterfully, wheeled up to them and with an apparently complete grasp of the situation whirled them off through a side street with never so much as a "Where to, sir?"

And so he found himself alone with an unknown beauty in a hansom cab, for all the world like a mysterious hero of melodrama, and Roger hated melodrama and was never mysterious in all his life, to say nothing of disliking mystery in anyone connected with him. He says he was extremely angry at this juncture and I believe him.

"What is your name?" he asked shortly. "Have you no parents or friends to protect you from the consequences of this crazy performance? Where do you live?"

"My name is Margarita," she replied directly and pleasantly, "I never had but one parent and he died a few days ago. I live by the sea."

An ugly thrill shot down his spine. No healthy person likes to be alone with a mad woman, and under a brilliant

fleeting light he studied her curiously only to receive the certain conviction that whatever his companion might be, she was not mad. Her slate-blue eyes were calm and bright, her lips rather noticeably firm for all their curves—and the mad woman's mouth bewrayeth her inevitably under scrutiny. Nor was she drugged into some passing vacancy of mind: her whole atmosphere breathed a perfectly conscious control of her movements, however misguided the event might prove them. Before this conviction he hesitated slightly.

"You have another name, however," he said gently, "and what do you mean by the sea? What sea?"

For it occurred to him that although her English was perfect, she might be an utter stranger to the country, unthinkably abandoned, with sufficient means to salve her betrayer's conscience.

"Is there more than one sea, then?" she inquired of him with interest. "I thought there was only mine. It is a very large one with high waves—and cold," she added as an after-thought.

Roger gasped. "You did not tell me your other name," he said.

"Joséphine," she replied readily, pronouncing the name in the French manner.

"But you have another still?"

"Yes. Dolores," she said, with an evidently accustomed Spanish accent.

"And the last name?" he persisted in despair, noting with some busy corner of his mind that they were drifting down Fifth Avenue.

"That is all there are," she assured him, "surely three different names are sufficient for one person? I do not use the last two—only Margarita."

Roger squared his shoulders, took the banknotes from her unresisting hand and gravely folded them into her bag before he spoke again.

"Listen to me, Miss Margarita," he said slowly and with exaggerated articulation, as one speaks to a child, "what was your father's name? What did the people in the town you live in call him?"

"I told you we lived by the sea—did you forget?" she answered, a shade reprovingly. "There is no town at all. And there are no people. We live alone."

"But your servants must have called him something?" he persisted.

"Hester called my father 'sir' and the boy cannot talk, of course," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because he is dumb. His name is Caliban," she added hastily, "and he has no other, only that one."

"What is Hester's name?" Roger demanded doggedly.

"Hester Prynne," said Margarita Joséphine Dolores, "and I have had nothing to eat since the man with the shining buttons gave me meat between bread a great many hours ago. I wish I might see another such man. He might be willing to give me more. Will you look out and tell me if you see one?"

"For heaven's sake," Roger cried, "you are hungry! You should have said so before—why didn't you?"

He called out a name to the cabman who took them quickly to a place now called "the old one," because the new one is filled with people who endeavour consistently to look newer than they are, I suppose. The wine is newer certainly, and the manners. At this place, then, in a quaint old corner, they found themselves, and Roger bespoke a meal calculated to please a young woman far more exigent than this lonely dweller by the sea was likely to be. The clearest of soups, the driest of sherry in a tiny glass, something called by the respectful and understanding waiter "*sôle frite*," which was at any rate, quite as good as if it had been that, a hot and savoury *poulet rôti*—and Roger, who had been too busy to take luncheon, looked about him,

contentedly well fed, rested his eyes with the clean, coarse linen, the red wine in its straw basket that had come with the *poulet*, the quiet, worn fittings of the little old-world place, and realised with a shock of surprise that his companion had not spoken a word since the meal began.

This was obviously not because she was famished, though she had the healthy hunger of the creature not yet done with growing, but because, simply, she felt no necessity for speech. She was evidently thinking, for her eyes had the fixed absorption of a child's who dreams over his bread and milk, but conversation she had none. He studied her, amused partly, partly lost in her beauty, for indeed she was beautiful. She had a pure olive skin, running white into the neck—oh, the back of Margarita's neck! That tender nape with its soft, nearly blonde locks that curled short about it below the heavy waves of what she called her "real hair." That was chestnut, dark brown at night. Nature had given her long dark lashes with perfect verisimilitude, but had at the last moment capriciously decided against man's peace and hidden behind them, set deep behind them under flexible Italian brows, those curious slate-blue eyes that fixed her face in your mind inalterably. You could not forget her. I know, because I have been trying for twenty years.

"You are not, I take it, accustomed to dining out, Miss Margarita?" said Roger, amused, contented, ignorant of the cause of his sudden sense of absolute *bien être*, or attributing it, man like, to his good dinner.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "I dine out very often. I like it better."

He bit his lip with quick displeasure; she was merely eccentric, then, not naïve. For like every other man Roger detested eccentric women. It has always been a marvel to me that women of distinct brain capacity so almost universally fail to realise that we like you better fashionable, even, than eccentric. You do not understand

why, dear ladies: you think it must be that we prefer fashion to brains, but indeed it is not so. It is because to be fashionable is for you to be normal, at least, that we tolerate your sheeplike marches and counter-marches across the plain of society.

"Where do you dine when you dine out?" he inquired coldly, to trap her at last into some explanation.

"On the rocks," she answered serenely, "or under the trees. Sometimes on the sand close to the water. I like it better than in the house."

Roger experienced a ridiculous sense of relief.

"Do you dine alone?" he asked and she answered quietly,

"Of course. My father always ate by himself, and Hester, too. Caliban will never let anyone see him eat: I have often tried, but he hides himself."

The waiter brought them at this point an ivory-white salad of *endive* set with ruby points of beet, drenched in pure olive-oil, and of this soothing luxury Margarita consumed two large plates in dreamy silence.

"I like this food," she remarked at last, "I like it better than Hester's."

Roger grew literally warm with satisfaction. He was still smiling when she spooned out a great mouthful of the delicate ice before her and under his amazed eyes set her teeth in it.

The horror of that humiliating scene woke him, years afterward, through more than one clammy midnight. In one second the peaceful dining-room was a chattering, howling reign of terror. For Margarita, with a choking cry of rage and anguish, threw the ice with terrible precision into the bland face of the waiter who had brought it; threw her glass of water with an equal accuracy into the wide-open eyes of the head waiter, who appeared instantly; threw Roger's wine-glass full into his own horrified face as he rose to catch her death-dealing hand, and lifting with

the magnificent single-armed sweep of a Greek war-goddess her chair from behind her, stood facing them, glaring silently, a slate-eyed Pallas gloriously at bay!

The red wine poured down Roger's face like blood; the force of the blow nearly stunned him, but by a supreme effort he bit furiously at his tongue and the pain steadied him. As he swept the table over with a crash and wrenched the chair from her hand (and he took his strength for it) he became aware that the angry excitement behind his back, the threatening babel, had subsided to long-drawn sighs of pity, and realised with a sort of disgusted relief that the blow he had himself suffered from this panting, writhing mænad had somehow changed the situation and that he was an object of horrified sympathy. Mercifully, the room was scantily filled, for it was early, and his curt explanation was accepted in respectful silence.

"Mademoiselle is—is not responsible for her act, I beg you to believe," he said grimly, white with humiliation and pain. "I beg you will accept . . ."

The two waiters pocketed a week's earnings in voluble deprecation, the proprietor shrugged his excitement away into an admirable regret, the diners wrenched their eyes from Margarita's face and affected to see nothing as Roger buttoned her cheapish vague-coloured jacket around her and ordered her sternly to straighten her hat. Her fingers literally trembled with rage, her soft, round breasts, strangely distinct in outline to his fingers as he strained the tight jacket over them, rose and fell stormily; in a troubled flash of memory he seemed to be handling some throbbing, shot bird. His own clumsiness and strange, heady elation he attributed to the shock of the wine in his face.

In an incredibly short time the table was upright, the débris removed, the room, except for the indefinable, electric sense of recent tragedy that hovers over such scenes, much as it had been. Roger had carried, fortunately for him, a light overcoat on his arm, and this would hide his white,

stained triangle of vest with a little management. Grasping Margarita by the arm he led her out of the room, and for the first time questioned her.

"Are you mad?" he muttered. "What do you mean by such a performance?"

"That man," she answered, her voice vibrating like a swept violoncello, "is a devil. Did you not see what he gave me? It was not food at all, but freezing snow. Snow should not be in a glass, but on the ground. It is plain that he wishes to kill me."

Her resonant voice filled every corner of the room; it was impossible for anyone in it to miss the situation, and with a sudden inspiration Roger spoke with a special distinctness to the proprietor, noticing that the dozen persons at the tables were obviously French, and using that language.

"Mademoiselle is but recently come out of the convent," said he. "She has lived always in the provinces and has never had the honour of tasting such admirable forms of dessert as Monsieur offers his patrons."

The proprietor bowed; an extraordinary mixture of expressions played over his countenance.

"That sees itself, Monsieur," he replied. "The affair is already forgotten. I have summoned a closed carriage for Monsieur."

And thus it was that Roger found himself for the second time in a carriage with Margarita Joséphine Dolores, but with a great difference in his attitude toward that young person. It is a fact possibly curious but certainly undeniable, that when one receives a wine-glass full in the face at the hands of an acquaintance, however recent, this acquaintance is placed immediately upon terms of a certain intimacy with one; the ice, at least, is broken. An unconscious conviction of this coloured Roger's tone and shone in his eyes.

"You must never do such a thing as that, Margarita," he said, "that was a terrible thing to do."

"It was a terrible thing that he did to me," replied Margarita composedly.

"Nonsense," said Roger, "perfect nonsense! The man meant you no harm. He brought you only what I had ordered for you."

"You! You told him to try to kill me?" cried this unbelievable Margarita, and turning in her seat with the swiftness of a panther she slapped him, a stinging, biting blow, flat across his cheek. A tornado of answering rage whirled him out of himself and seizing her wrists, he bent them behind her back.

If I seem to be unwarrantably acquainted with Roger's emotions at this crisis, it is only because I understand them from experience, not because he analysed them at length for me. I too have been in conflict, real physical conflict, with Margarita. I too have felt that old unpitying frenzy, that unreasonable delight in vanquishing her furious strength. Something in Roger—I know how suddenly, how amazingly—strained and snapped; the old bonds of civilisation (which with the Anglo-Saxon has always been feminisation) burst and dropped away, and the lust of physical ascendency caught him and swept the pretty legends of moral control and chivalrous forbearing into the dust bins and kitchen middens of nature's great domestic economy. What was it in Margarita that drew that old, primitive passion, that ancient world-stuff out of its decorous grave, all planted with orchids and maiden-hair, that woke it with a rough shout in us and offered us at the same time its natural gratification—a fierce fight and a certain victory? God knows and knows better, perhaps, than the Devil that Roger's ancestors would have been quick to credit with the exclusive knowledge.

Civilisation and her mysterious daughter whom we call nowadays Culture have tried to teach us that golf and lawn tennis and, for the lustiest, fencing, or the control of a spirited horse, must best translate in your house-broken citizen of

forty the heat that surged up in Roger then; but to most of us it becomes once or twice apparent in our sidewalk career, our delicate journey from mahogany sideboards to mahogany beds, that this teaching is idiotic to the last degree, however strictly the police have enforced it; and we know that only the man that forged with clenched teeth after Atalanta, tenderly hungry for all her uncaptured whiteness, brutally driving the pace till her heart burst in her side if need be, tasted the supremest ecstasy of the fighting that lifts us that one tantalising step above the savage—the fight for joy. I am convinced that it is after some one of those red glimpses that a certain proportion of us every year of the world's life throws his chest weights out of window, settles his tailor's bill, and is off for Africa or Greenland with a hatchet and a cartridge belt. We become thus inscrutable to our maiden aunts and it may be to ourselves, a little, when we discover that it was not quite exactly the struggle for food and shelter, the fight against the cliffs and elements and animals that we went out into the wilderness to seek. But we are in any event less unreasonable than those belated and blindfolded ones among us who translate the implacable desire too literally and lose its meaning utterly in the garbled text of the midnight city streets.

Roger literally fell upon this vixenish, beautiful creature with the perfectly definite intention of shaking her until her teeth chattered in her head, but he did not achieve this result, for the reason that Margarita fought like a demon; fought, her hands being pinioned, with her supple back, her strong shoulders and her rigid knees. It was like struggling with a malicious little girl of six and a stubborn boy of sixteen rolled into one. She did not cry nor chatter but set her teeth and directed all her superb energy to the actual business in hand. His idea of grasping both her wrists with one hand was out of the question; for two or three delicious, angry moments he essayed this, enraged, amused, breathing hard, while she strained and bent with all her

magnificent youth against him, and the years and the rust of the years fell off from him in the heartsome contest, with victory certain but not easy, her submission sure—but not yet! Some subterranean spring welled up in him, some trickle from the everlasting caves that will only be completely levelled over when humanity, decadent, crumbles into them and returns to the primal clay, and he knew that for these few gleaming seconds, snatched from the rest of the greyish hours and weeks, he had been made and destined.

You will, of course, perceive that all this is what I felt when my little turn came; Roger never talked this sort of thing in his life. But unless I am vastly mistaken, he lived it, in those galloping quick-breathed minutes, before he pinioned Margarita, her hands behind her back, with one arm, and held her fast about the knees with the other. Crushed against him, dead weight, she lay, her unconquered eyes sea black now, flat against his, her heart labouring heavily, under his relentless, banding arm.

"Will you be good, you absurd little wildcat? Will you?" he demanded, his voice shaking with laughter and truimph. (And you need not be too ready, O exponent of tolerant hearthstone chivalry, to smile at the triumph! V—l, whom Margarita detested, practically refused to sing *Siegfried* to her *Brünhilde*, because, he said, she made him ridiculous with her virginal strugglings and got him out of breath besides! And he could lift and carry Lilli Lehmann.)

"Will you?" Roger repeated, not loosening his hold of her, for he felt her muscles tense as wire under the soft flesh.

"No, I will not," said Margarita. "I hate you. I will die before I will obey you."

And at this foolish and melodramatic remark, Roger Bradley, descendant of all the Puritans (Whistler used to say that he was by Plymouth Rock out of Mayflower—alas, dear Jimmie!), a respected bachelor, of exemplary habits and no entanglements, deliberately, and with a happy,

heartfelt oath, kissed Margarita, at length and somewhat brutally, I fear, in a hired four-wheeler at the junction of Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. And of his sensations at this point I cannot speak, because I never had them. I never kissed Margarita but once and then very quickly, because I was convinced that upon my subsequent speed depended my ever seeing her alive again. And she did not struggle at all, because, as a matter of fact, it was perfectly immaterial to her whether I kissed her or not. But that was not the case with Roger's kiss.

CHAPTER III

AS THE TWIGS WERE BENT

THE day that Roger and I first met is as clear in my mind as if, in the current phrase, it were but yesterday. I was a slender little lad of ten and he a great, strapping fifteen-year-old. I was trundling my hoop about the part of the schoolyard usually given over to the little fellows, as blue as indigo, homesick for my mammy-O, and secretly ashamed of the French schoolboy cape I had worn at Vevay, which all my mates derided, but she in her woman's thrift had thought too good to throw aside. No doubt she was right, but oh, what you make us suffer, you gentle widow mothers! You would give us the hearts out of your fervent bodies for footballs, you will nurse at our sick beds without rest and deny yourself the comforts of existence, if need be, to start us fairly in the world with a gentle training and schools of the best, but you cannot comprehend that we would far rather go without a meal in private than be the mock of our schoolmates in public. I would have lived on bread and water for a week could I have buried that French cloak at the end of it.

The very sport in which I was engaged was not in use among the other boys of my age, but inconsistently enough, though I was eager to conform as far as the cloak was concerned, wild horses could not have dragged me from my wooden hoop, and I trundled it sulkily up and down the flagged paths.

To me, an odd figure enough to young American eyes, advanced and spoke Monsieur Duval, in whose regard I was the most homelike and natural figure in the landscape, I

have no doubt. It was with a real kindness that he called out some cheery nothing, some "*Ah! Ah! ça va bien—vous vous amusez, n'est-ce pas?*" or such like, and with an equal and unconscious amiability that I replied in like manner. The language was perfectly familiar to me, especially in its present routine connection, and I took off my cap instinctively, as I should have done at Vevay, and probably said something about my being *joliment bien amusé*, which was purely perfunctory of course, because I wasn't. He passed by and I trundled my hoop along, but only during the space of time required for his complete exit from the scene, for at the precise ending of that time I was violently set upon by three or four boys, dragged, protesting and frightened, to a private retreat, and there informed that my nauseating familiarity with the French language and consequent "showing off" therein must cease incontinently, and that the event of my refusing this ultimatum would be a perilous and not easily forgotten one for a little sneak like me.

Now our school at Vevay had been entirely under the influence, in its secret and really important life, of a circle of English boys, cruelly banished from their natural educational facilities, who made up for this banishment by a careful and systematic insistence on as much as possible of their native school atmosphere, and we little ones were bred up in this very strictly. The word "sneak" was too much for me, and I flew at the offender, which was, I suppose, what he wanted.

It would have gone hard indeed with me had not a tall, broad-shouldered boy, glorious in a jersey enriched with the initials of the school, swung suddenly upon us and twitched me out of the bandit crew by my coat collar.

"What's all this? What are you up to?" he asked briskly.

He had a baseball bat with him—I regarded baseball at that time as a sort of cricket gone mad—and a round visored cap on his thick fair hair. His chin was deeply

cleft, his eyes grey-blue, his skin very fair. To me he was an upper-form demi-god and I, seeing nothing odd in his actions, for he was what I called the cock of the school, voiced my trembling plea.

"If you please, sir," I began, whereat he blushed and my captors burst into derisive shouts and capered around us, and thoroughly embarrassed and frightened, I began to snivel into my elbow.

"We don't talk that way over here," he admonished me shortly, "go ahead without any sirs, can't you?"

Well, it all came out finally and he settled it very easily, though not, I am sure, in the way he had at first intended to. I saw his fingers tighten around the bat, I saw him warily measuring his chances against four twelve-year-olds, and realised suddenly that this was not Albion the long desired of some of us at Vevay, but free America, and that this was not really the head boy nor had he any rights in particular beyond any knight's who chooses to ride a-rescuing. Nevertheless I was and am sure he could have punished them all and that without the bat. Suddenly, however, a reflective look came across his face, he stroked the cleft in his chin thoughtfully—a trick he never lost—and said in a quiet, convincing tone:

"You always were an awful fool, Judson," this to the bully. "If you had the sense of a cat you wouldn't haze this little fellow for what he can't help, but instead you'd use him. Why, if *I* had him in *my* French class, I'd make him do most of the reciting and keep old Duval busy—he'd never see through it. Think it over. Come on, shaver!"

This he said to me and I trotted off his slave—his fag, I hoped, but vainly, as it proved.

I tell this at length because it illustrates Roger's character so perfectly. Not that he couldn't fight, but he preferred not if a little practical arbitration could be made to do the work of battle. And yet he was rather tactless in a social sense: this was his professional attitude, you understand.

"You're the little French boy," he said, as I followed him. "What's your name, anyhow? I'm Roger Bradley." As if I didn't know!

"If you pl—I mean, mine is Winfred Jerrolds," I said shyly.

"You're not really French, are you?"

It was the first time I had ever been proud of my American blood. I told him about my American mother and my English father, his tragic death and her return to her own country after twelve years of absence; of the acquisition of my wonderful French, which was only the work of two years, of my violin lessons, strictly concealed from the other boys, of my old Swiss nurse, now our cook, of my French poodle, and a score of other secrets never breathed before.

He was deeply interested, inquired the brave details of my father's death, shook hands heartily, and expressed his intention of inviting me to his home some time during the vacation. We parted the best of friends and shall be, I trust, till we part for good and all.

I did not visit him, however, that vacation. Some slight injury, received during a game of his favourite baseball, affected his eyes, and for six months he could not use them at all, so he did not return to school until the next autumn. When we met again it was on a different basis, for I had made good use of my time and had mounted rapidly in my classes. Whether it was because I kept the habit of vacation study (the entire lazy freedom of American school children during the long vacation was very shocking to my mother) or whether my habit of application and concentration, the fact that I had really been taught to study, not merely turned loose with a book in my hands, gave me an advantage over my mates, I do not know, but when Roger came back he found me only three classes below him and graduated from the little boys' playground forever.

That summer he took me home with him and I gazed

with deep respect upon the portraits of his ancestors, fading against the dark wainscots of the respectable Boston mansion; played my violin obediently for his mother, who presented me with a volume of Emerson's essays; hung upon the lips of his soldier-uncle, one-armed since Gettysburg, who in his turn listened gravely to my tales of my father; and sedulously avoided his cousin Sarah, who, even then, a fresh-faced girl of eighteen, had begun to feel those responsibilities toward the human race which have since so consistently distinguished her, and pursued me with hideous bits of paper bearing a mocking resemblance to blank cheques, which she called "pledges," by means of which she urged me to begin in the days of my youth the practice of total abstinence, with the result that she has become hopelessly involved in my mind with that revolting practice. They were Unitarians, a doctrine then fashionable in those regions, oddly enough, and greatly to the puzzlement of my dear mother, who could not understand how dissent could ever be so, and who was firmly convinced that "your Bradleys" as she called them, were addicted to ranting prayers on all occasions. In vain I described to her old Madam Bradley with a scrap of frosty lace on her white hair, a terrifying ear trumpet and the manners of a countess; in vain I assured her that Uncle Winthrop would no more be guilty of a ranting prayer than my father would have been: she shook her head gently and urged me to recall my confirmation vows!

My dear mother! To write of her even so slightly is to see her in her neat black dress with its web-like bands of lawn at neck and wrists, directing old Jeanne, *bonne-à-tout-faire* now in our small establishment, watering our window geraniums from a quaint, long-nosed copper pot, drilling Mr. Boffin, the poodle, in his manners, and, when the early dinner was out of the way, sitting in all simplicity with Jeanne at work upon my shirts—the only example of really democratic institutions that I ever saw in this irascible democracy.

I should like to have seen Madam Bradley sewing with the cook and innocently gossiping over the old days!

Well, well, even to have invented so inhumanly possible an ideal as democracy is a great feat and a wonderful exhibition of the powers of our minds on this planet, I suppose. And I am not sure that it is a greater proof of sincerity to practice it while denying it in theory, as they do in the old countries, than to reverse the process in the new ones. Americans are such incurable idealists! And if Plato is right and the idea is the really important part of the matter, then the idea of seventy—or is it eighty, now?—millions of equal lords of creation is really more to the point than the fact that they don't exist. But why, oh why, must equality produce such bad manners? They must have been very bad to make such an impression upon a little lad of ten. And who can explain its extraordinary effect upon the voice? Why does it kill all modulation, all tone-color, all delicate shades of thought and passion equally, and resolve that great gift, which I sometimes think the greatest difference between me and my dog, into a toneless, mumble-chopped grunting?

That was the glory of Margarita's voice: if she but informed you that she would like more bread, your ear relished that series of unimportant syllables precisely as the tongue relishes a satisfying dish; with her, pleading, commanding, refusing, admiring, were four perfectly different tonal processes; a blind man, an Eskimo or a South Sea Islander would have understood that voice perfectly. And even now, merely a shadow of what it once was, it is a lesson to all about her.

When Roger was seventeen and I but twelve he lost two years out of his school-life, and this brought us closer together ultimately, as will be seen. In some more than usually violent game of his favourite baseball at this time he managed to fall so heavily on his chest as slightly to bruise the lung, and a teasing cough that resulted from this ter-

rified his mother, over whom, like so many of her pure-blooded countrywomen, the White Scourge hung threateningly, never very far away. Good luck sent them just then an invitation from a distant cousin, skipper of a large schooner that plied in Southern waters, and she thankfully sent Roger off for a long cruise with him. It was a fine experience, and oh, how bitterly I longed to share it, as the skipper cousin urged me to do! But I was the only son of my mother and she a widow, and so I swallowed my grief and contented myself with writing. It had long been a great grief to me that I must follow him so far behind at college—he had of course decided me on his own university—and one of my contentments at this period was the hope of winning ahead a year and leaving only two between us. This would enable me to enter Yale when he was but half way in his course, which as a matter of fact, I accomplished, to my mother's great pride. She liked Roger, but always found him a little heavy and slow, and secretly cherished my greater facility and more rapid mental development with a fond and wholly female short-sightedness.

Our correspondence was very characteristic at this time: I have specimens of both sides of it. My letters are long and detailed, almost school-diaries. Roger's are few, short and immensely impressive. He had a straightforward, utterly unimaginative style that strikes the heart like Defoe's. He gave the strongest sense of great events always happening, of high seas, bright, strange coasts, racy, vital talk—and all in few, short words.

"We have been rolling hard for three days now," he says in one letter, "and the ship's dog died of colic, which is about the worst sign there is, they say. It may be we shall be wrecked. I wish you were here, Jerry, you would enjoy it. They have stopped trying to coddle me now and I live rough, like the rest. The food is not so very good, but we all eat hard. I hardly ever cough at all now. The captain says I am as handy as the next man."

The oldest of four, he had been looked up to and respected from the nursery. A powerful influence at school, a prince regent at home, wealthy in his own right, he stood in some danger of being spoiled, I suppose. But the bluff skipper cousin, representative of that strange New England *Wanderlust*, so little exploited in the anemic fiction that so ridiculously caricatures New England life, stamped Roger at this most impressionable age with the clean, downright simplicity, the manly humility so signally characteristic of men who must always be ready to perish in the elements; the ability to hold his tongue and wait. Few families really rooted in that Old England that made the New but can count in some generation their skipper cousin; in these the whitecaps, the tall masts, the spices and hot nights, the scarlet tropics and the dusky, startled natives tip with flame the quiet chronicles of the sisters left at home; and gorgeous peacock fans, rosy, enamelled shells, strings of sandalwood beads, riotous, bloomy embroideries and supple folds of exotic muslin weave their scents and suggestions through the sober-coloured stuff of everyday. Indeed, New England as I have known her, both as a child in her chief and representative city, and as a man in her farthest, least-spoiled hamlets has always seemed to me far more complicated and mysterious, far more vital and suggestive than her too-exclusively-spinsterly chroniclers can comprehend.

I look to see the country turn back to New England, not only with historic pride, but with a rich appreciation of its artistic mother-land—not mistaking her for its bleak and apprehensive maiden aunt!

I am far from her now, that old breeding ground of great, incisive sons, that nest of passions so strong that only a grip of granite—like her sea line—could master them (do you fancy, O languorous, faded South, do you bellow, O strident, bustling West, that because she neither sighed them nor trumpeted them, she had no passions? *Allez, allez!*) but I can close my eyes at any moment and smell the challenge

of her Atlantic winds here on the Mediterranean or feel the heady languor of her miraculous "Indian Summer" there in a London drizzle. It is strange that I, who have said many unhandsome things of her country as a whole, should thus rush into apologia for my mother's birthplace. And yet to think of never having known Margarita!

But of course I should have met her. She would have come to me walking lightly out of the dim Algerian evening or bumped into me some morning in Piccadilly or peered curiously through my leaded pane at Oxford, whither I should undoubtedly have returned, one day, to muse away my middle age. I idled for a happy year there, twenty-odd years ago, while Roger was grinding away at the fantastic matter he called the Law, and liked it well. But fate had not decreed me for a conventional Englishman, which I should doubtless have been, for as a boy I was malleable to a degree, but had reserved me instead for the ends of the earth—and Margarita.

CHAPTER IV

FATE REELS IN

THERE is nothing more certain than that the bare facts of life are misleading in the extreme. This is doubtless nature's reason for concealing the human skeleton; it is undeniably necessary, but not many of us take it into daily consideration, and nobody but a few negligible anthropologists would dream of bringing it forward as proof of anything in particular. And yet people who are fond of describing themselves as practical persistently fold their hands over their abdomens, shrug their shoulders and reiterate monotonously: "But, my dear fellow, there are the facts! It is only necessary to consider the facts of the case!" or, "I'm sorry, but I'm afraid the bare facts are against you!" I suppose that is why they are so often called bare, because so little of the important, informing or attractive is draped around them.

Consider for instance, the bare facts of Roger's adventure. Here is a man who, meeting a perfectly unknown and singularly beautiful young woman in a questionable locality at dusk, enters into conversation with her, takes her to a French restaurant for dinner, then finds himself embroiled in a disgraceful altercation in which wine-glasses are thrown and chairs waved, and finally escapes with her in a closed carriage, which soon becomes the scene of a violent struggle culminating in a ferocious kiss! The case is really too clear; it is almost too conventional for an art student of any initiative and originality. Anyone possessed of the slightest acquaintance with fiction or the daily papers could tell you

instantly that here were a dissipated clubman and a too-unfortunately-stereotyped creature who not only required no description but were best, in the interests of morality, undescribed. And yet Roger was emphatically not dissipated, nor even a clubman, in the sense in which the word appears to be used in America, and Margarita was not in the least unfortunate and so far from stereotyped that she pressed the unusual hard toward the utterly unique.

"Well, well," I hear the practical man, "but this is a case in one—five—ten thousand, surely! We all know—"

My good man, there is absolutely nothing we all know except that we shall certainly die, one day, and from this one bare fact more utterly contradictory inferences have been drawn than I can afford ink to enumerate. Nothing could be more certain than this bare fact, and can you show me anything more productive of human uncertainty? I trow not. What do you know of the private life of the man in the next house? Have you a friend who cannot tell you from one to three melodramatic tales, lying quite within his experience, at which you will gasp, "Why, it's as exciting as a novel!" The best novels never get into print and the most blood-curdling, goose-pimpling dramas are played by the boxholders. The longer I live the more firmly am I convinced that the really quiet life is relatively rare.

To Roger, indeed, after his climax in the four-wheeler, it seemed impossible that life could ever again be quiet. If I have not impressed you with the idea that he was a decent sort of man, I have wasted a whole chapter and demonstrated the folly of attempting authorship at my age, and you will be but poorly prepared to learn that when the cabby knocked at the glass, after heaven knows how many minutes of interested observation, Roger discovered his identity again—and loathed it. His conduct appeared to him indescribably beneath contempt, his situation deplorable. Margarita, sobbing quietly in her corner, seemed unlikely to raise either his spirits or his estimate of himself.

Opening the door of the carriage he repeated his directions to the too-confidential driver and spoke stiffly to his companion.

"I will not attempt to excuse myself to you," he said, "for it would be pointless. If you can believe me, I will try my best to help you to your friends. Can you not tell me the name of one?"

"What is your name?" she asked, her voice only a little shaken from her sobs, which had ceased as soon as he began to speak.

"My name is Roger Bradley," he answered promptly.

"Then that is the name of my first friend," said Margarita Joséphine Dolores, "but I hope to find others."

Roger's revulsion of feeling was so great, his state of mind so perturbed and confounded that he crushed them into a short, husky laugh. Had he been the hero of a novel he would undoubtedly have launched into a bitter speech, but he did not.

"Others like me?" he said briefly, and all the bitterness of the novel-hero was there if Margarita had been able to read it. But she only smiled, a little uncertainly, it is true, and replied:

"Yes, I should like them like you—only not so strong," she added softly, with a shy glance at her wrists.

It has been quite unnecessary for me to consult letters or diaries to give me a very clear insight into Roger's feelings at this point, for I myself have experienced them. It was when I took Margarita out in a rowboat and she began to rock herself in it.

"Don't do that, Margarita!" I cried. "That is an idiotic trick."

She continued to rock it.

"Do you hear me, Margarita?" I demanded, tapping her foot with some irritation, for she really was irritating. In fact she completely upset the theory that tact and adaptability constitute her sex's chief charm.

"Of course I hear you. If you kick me, I shall only rock the harder," she answered composedly—and did so.

Shipping the oars carefully I arose, advanced upon Margarita and boxed her ears with determination. I should have done it in mid-ocean. I doubt if sharks in sight would have deterred me. As I was boxing her ears—beautiful, strong ones, they were, not tiny, selfish, high-set bits of porcelain: W—r M—l (who would have been *Sir* W—r M—l in England to-day) said of Margarita's ears that they were set convincingly low and that he looked to her to demonstrate one of his favourite tests of longevity—in the very act of this boxing. I repeat, I was cruelly bitten in the wrists, and, snorting with rage, pure, primitive, unchivalrous rage, I fell upon that shameless little Pagan and shook her violently, till the teeth rattled in her head. Over we went, the pair of us, struggling like demons, into the chilly, rational water, and as Margarita, like so many people who live by the sea, was utterly ignorant of the art of swimming and like so many people of her temperament, violently averse to the sudden shock of cold water, it was a subdued and dripping young woman that I dragged to the overturned boat and ultimately towed to shore. I worked hard to get her there and had no time for remorse, but as I hurried her up the beach it flooded over me.

"What must you think of me?" I asked her through chattering teeth. "You will not care to meet any more of Roger's friends, I fear."

"Oh, yes," she returned sweetly, looking incomprehensibly lovely—ah, me, that long, smooth line of her hip, that round, sleek head, shining like bronze in the sun! I can see it now—"Oh, yes, I hope he has many more like you, Jerry, but not so strong—you hurt my arm!"

It is useless to ask me why that should have endeared her a hundred times over to me, who would have given a year of my life to kiss her but might not. It did thus endear her, however, and so I know what hot, foolish hope flooded Roger

off his footholds of conventions and convictions and floated him away in a warm, alluring sea, where the tropic palm-isles of Fata Morgana were the only shores. I, too, caught a glimpse of those shores; the warmth of that sea was only the blood pounding through my veins, and I knew it, but I shut my eyes and let the waves lap at me a moment. Roger, lucky dog, did not know and did not need to know what was happening to him, and it was not for a moment, but forever, as far as he knew, that he slipped into the current and drifted with it.

It was very characteristic of him that his next words had, apparently, no bearing whatever on his state of mind.

"We are now," he said, "at the station. If you will tell me the name of the town from which you came here, I will see that you get back there. Believe me, it is the only possible thing to do. You cannot stay here. Now, where did you come from?"

It took some few minutes to convince Roger that the girl literally did not know the name of the station at which she had purchased her ticket to New York. She knew she had travelled all day, and that was all. She had slipped out from her home at dawn or before, left the mysterious Hester Prynne asleep, walked five miles (Hester had said it was five miles to the railroad) to a little town where a girl had sold her the clothes she had on for one of her banknotes and advised her to go to New York if she wished to see the world, "which was what I did wish," said Margarita.

A young man behind some bars had given her the ticket and some small money back from another note and a kind old man with white hair and a tall black hat had sat beside her after a while, and pressed so hard against her that she had no room for her knees. She had told him of this inconvenience, but to no avail. He had put his arm about her shoulders and asked her why she did not change her plans and come to Boston. Then she had told him that though she wanted friends she did not care for such old ones, and

when he still pressed against her she had asked the man with the shining buttons who looked at her ticket if he would not remove the old man, because she did not like to sit so close to anyone, and she was sure the old man was sitting closer all the time. Then he of the buttons took her somewhere else and bade her sit beside a woman, grey-haired also, who would not talk at all, and left her by and by. After this the buttoned man gave her meat between bread. Still later a young man with beautiful, large eyes inquired if he might sit beside her and she agreed gladly. He smelled very good. He asked where she was going and she said to find friends. He said she would find many on Broadway and that easily; she had only to show herself there. He offered to point out the way there and just as all seemed in the best possible way the buttoned man came again, frowned on the good-smelling young man and took his seat. He talked a good deal to Margarita—so much that she could not very well attend to it. At last he gave her a large grey veil and commanded her to wrap her head in it, and he would look after her when they got to New York. But when they did get to New York she eluded him and asked the way to Broadway, and then she met Roger. So, as the young man had said, there were friends on Broadway. But there were none in the town from which she took the ticket and she had no idea what its name was. Hester never mentioned it. She did not believe it had a name.

All this as the cab rested by the kerbstone. It was perfectly obvious that she was speaking the truth. They had patronised this particular driver long enough, anyway, and Roger paid him liberally and led Margarita into the draggled, dusty station; the new one was not then built. Seated beside her in a relatively dim corner he tried to formulate some plan, but the absurd emptiness of the situation baffled even his practical good sense. How could he take this girl to a town that neither he nor she knew the name of? How, on the other hand, could he fling such a pro-

SCOOPED HUNDREDS—PERHAPS THOUSANDS—OUT OF A CHEST, TO FLEE AT DAWN

jectile as Margarita into any respectable hotel? What would she do—or say? True, he might possibly have presented her as his sister and kept her sternly in view during every possible moment, but she was not sufficiently well dressed to be his sister. And his overcoat was buttoned suspiciously high. Was he to stroll out of the waiting-room and leave her abandoned, like some undesirable kitten, in the corner? The idea was ludicrous: she must be taken care of. Had she thrust herself upon him, enticed him, challenged him? Assuredly not; moved by some completely inexplicable influence, utterly alien to himself, his birth, his training, he had deliberately and persistently questioned her, prolonged a trifling encounter unjustifiably, whirled her away, literally; and now that he had found no suitable place of deposit it was incredible that he should deliver this extraordinary and self-assumed charge to civil authority. It would have been almost as well to lead her back to Broadway, he told himself sternly. The most exotic foreigner would have found herself in better case, it occurred to him, for interpreters of one sort or another can always be found. But Margarita seemed foreign to this planet, very nearly. What should be said of a person who lived on a nameless shore, served by Hester Prynne and Caliban? Who scooped hundreds—perhaps thousands—out of a chest, to flee at dawn from a town whose name she had never heard mentioned, though she had lived within walking distance of it all her life?

It was absurd—but something must be done. Margarita sat contented and amused, devouring the shabby bustle all around her with her great deep-set eyes, willing, apparently, to sit there indefinitely.

"Will you let me examine your bag?" Roger said at last, and she handed him the coarse, imitation-leather affair. There was a soiled, cheap handkerchief in it, some four hundred dollars in banknotes, and a torn envelope with a town and state written clearly on it.

I have tried to write the name of this town, and when I found that impossible, I tried to invent one to take its place, but I could not do it. Surely it is nothing to any of you who may happen to read this poor attempt of mine to pass my time, nothing, and less than nothing, just what may be the name of the utterly unimportant little backwater of a village from which, if you know the way, you may walk four miles or so to Margarita's home. Undoubtedly many of you sail by it often, but it is hidden from you by the rise of the ground, the high rocks and the great, ancient-looking wall that I helped to pile. These and the reefs protect it quite sufficiently. And I do not want you there. It would prove far too interesting a spot to jaded trippers and trotters —and it is amazing how quickly your new countries grow jaded; more eager for fresh scenes than old Japan herself, Nippon the rice-blest, the imperishable, whence I send these words.

Be satisfied, then, to know that in the direction of this torn envelope Roger held the clew to Margarita's nameless home. Yes, the young woman had sold her the bag with the clothing and advised her to put the banknotes in it. No, she did not know her name. She smelled good—like the young man who advised Broadway.

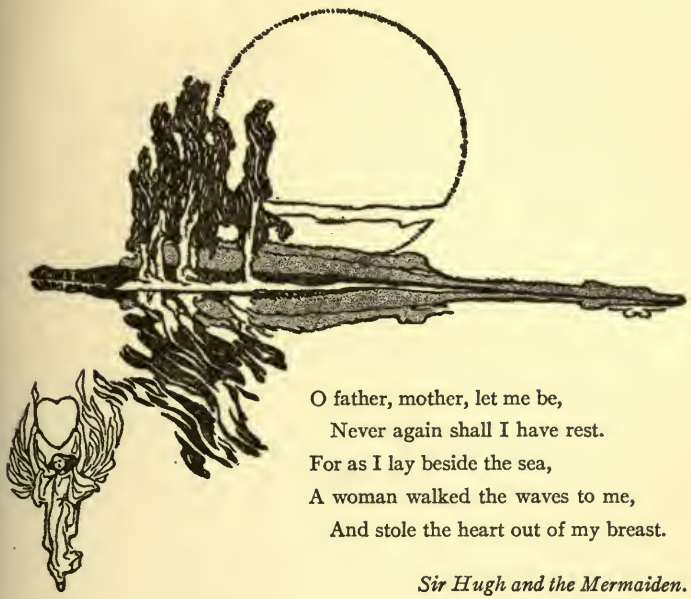
"Come, Margarita," said Roger gravely, "let us see when you can start," and she followed him submissively to the wicket, matched her stride to his on his discovery that a train which would take them half way was just about to start, and ran beside him to the steps of the car. He motioned to her to mount and she did so, turning at the top of the steps with a face of sudden terror.

"You are not going to leave me, Roger Bradley?" she cried, "where am I going?"

"Certainly I shall not leave you. You are going home," he said quietly, and mounted after her. The guard stared at them, the bell clanged sadly and the train moved out of the station. The play, you see, was well along.

PART TWO

IN WHICH THE SPRING FLOWS IN A LITTLE STREAM



O father, mother, let me be,
  Never again shall I have rest.
For as I lay beside the sea,
A woman walked the waves to me,
  And stole the heart out of my breast.

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER V

ROGER FINDS THE ISLAND

It goes without saying that I have a retentive memory. Of course I depend very largely upon it for all the small details that Roger has from time to time vouchsafed me in regard to his relations with Margarita, or I could not very well be writing these idle memories, but Roger was always a poor writer—that is to say, so far as comment and amplification and variety of manner may be supposed to make a good one. Witness the following letter, which I received in answer to my plea for details of that strange night journey from New York to Margarita's town. It left a gap in my story of which I never happened to receive any account, and it seemed to me a fairly important gap, though you will see that this was not Roger's view of it.

Dear Jerry:

It is rather late in the day to ask me about that trip to ——. We hardly spoke for a long time, as I am sure I have told you before—either of us. There was no berth to be had for her and no drawing-room car on, so we rode all night in the day coach with a rather mixed lot. I remember they snored and it amused her. She wanted to wake them up and I had to speak sharply to prevent her. The air got very bad and I took her out on the platform for a while. I remember there were any amount of stars and the moon out, too. You know she never talked much. About one o'clock we got to S—— and changed cars for a few minutes' wait. . . . I think it was then that she asked me abruptly what I meant by a "convent." She said it in French and I saw that she spoke and understood the lan-

guage, but only in a simple, childish sort of way. I told her it was a big school. "What is that?" she said. . . . There were a number of Italians on the train, and they were chattering like magpies, but she paid no attention to them, and I was sure she did not understand them. At —— we got out and I asked her if there would be any livery stable open at that hour, for it was not more than four o'clock. She did not know, of course, what a livery stable was and told me that we must either go in a boat or walk. So we walked. The sun rose while we were walking. I think this is all you wanted.

There you have it! Could anything be simpler? "I remember there were any amount of stars . . . You know she never talked much."—Oh, Roger, Roger! Must you always have the doing and I the telling? Even to this day, though I would cut off this hand for you, I am jealous of you. "The sun rose while we were walking"! Ah me, to walk with Margarita through the dawn! She was the very dawn of life herself, untarnished, unfatigued, unashamed. To me who have known her, other women are as pictures in a gallery —lovely pictures, many of them, but a little faded and fingermarked, somehow.

We shall have to take that walk for granted. I know that it consisted of a quarter-mile of sleeping village, three quarters of a mile of scattered houses, two miles of widely separated farms and then two last miles of bayberry, salt meadow, coarse grass, rocky sand and blue, inrolling seas. I know how the salty, strengthening air blew Roger's lungs clean of the frightful murk of the car, how the strange, stunted windrocked trees gave an odd, unreal air of Japan to that bleak shore; I can half close my eyes now and lo, Atami and her thundering, surf-swept beach broadens out before me, and the breakers as they come pounding in, chase—not the withered, monkeylike old priest who searches endlessly for something in the seaweed, girding his clean, faded robe above his bare sticks of legs—but Margarita and me. The camphor

THE TALL, GAUNT, SILENT WOMAN . . .
STRIDING THROUGH THE PASTURES

trees lose their lacquered green and turn to distant chestnut; the scarlet lily fades to a dull rose marsh flower; the lines of the temple are only quaintly-eaved rocks and ledges, and I am over seas again. I wonder if that is the reason I love this place so? But there were no geyser baths there and I had no rheumatism then! *Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe*—even the sciatic nerve, we will hope.

Well, then, after they had made what Roger with his usual accuracy in such matters took for nearly five miles, it occurred to him to ask Margarita how it was that she knew her way so well, for she went through pastures, broken walls, here and there a bit of the country road, with the air of long practice. At first she would not tell him. I can imagine that slanting school-boy look, that quietly malicious indrawing of the corners of the mouth: the most enchanting obstinacy conceivable. They were following at the time a narrow beaten path, perhaps a cattle track, but that was not her guide, for often such a path curved and returned aimlessly on itself or branched off quite widely from the direction she took. At first, as I say, she was deaf to his question, but when he repeated it, patiently, I have no doubt, but evidently determined upon an answer, she yielded, as we all yield to Roger in the end, and confessed that she had once followed Hester to the village and back by this road. Hester had never guessed it, never in fact turned her back when once started, and it had been easy to keep her in sight. At the edge of the town Margarita had felt a little shy and apprehensive of her fate if discovered, so she had sat by the wood-side till Hester appeared again and followed her meekly home.

Since then I have been able to gather some idea of Hester's appearance from various sources, and I own that the situation has always seemed to me picturesque in the extreme: the tall, gaunt, silent woman in her severe, dull dress striding through the pastures, and behind her, stealthily as an Indian—or an Italian avenger—the dark, lovely child, now crouching amongst the bayberry, now defiantly erect, but always grace-

ful as a panther, her hair loose on her slender shoulders. I cannot forbear to add that in this picture of mine, a great vivid letter burns on the woman's breast, inseparable from her name, of course. But this only adds to the sombre power of the picture. It is a thing for Vedder to paint, in witchlike browns and greys.

Margarita had never made this journey but once, but she followed her old trail with the precision of a savage. I myself have gone that way once only: and then but half of the distance, or a little less. It was not in bayberry time, but through a land smooth and blue-white with snow and with a terror pulling my heart out that I am sure I could never endure again. How we flew over the snow! It was all a ghastly glare, a dancing sun in a torquoise sky . . . No, no, one does not live through such things twice and I hate even the memory of it. Even with the boiling geyser rumbling behind me, filling the baths with comfort and oblivion, I shiver to my very marrow.

After they had followed a certain marshy band of vivid green for several pasture-lengths, Margarita shook her head slightly, retraced her steps and stopped at a point where three or four great flat stones made a sort of causeway across the glistening, muddy strip, and Roger, following her as she jumped lightly over, saw that they stood upon a little rocky promontory joined only by this strange bit of marsh to the mainland. The strip was here not a hundred feet wide, and winding in on either side of this two little inlets crept sluggishly along and lost themselves in the marsh. The promontory was there very barren and it seemed to Roger that the girl was going to lead him out into the shallow cove that faced them, but a few more steps showed him that just here the point of land curved around this cove, which swept far inland, and broadened out wonderfully into several acres of meadow-hay dotted with sparse, stunted cedars.

Directly before him lay a wet, shining beach, for the tide was half gone, and a hundred yards out, the tops of what might al-

most have been a built wall of nasty pointed rocks formed a perfect lagoon across the face of the promontory. At high tide these would not show, but they were there, always guarding, always bare-toothed, and as far again beyond them a bell-buoy mounted on a similar ledge seemed to point to the existence of a double barrier. It was a great lonesome bay of the Atlantic that he looked at, its arms on either side desolate, scrubby and forbidding, with not a hint of life. Suddenly, as he stared, wondering, and Margarita stood quiet beside him, a long, quavering bellow came from behind him.

"It is the cow," said Margarita reassuringly, as he whirled around, "she is calling Caliban to milk her, I suppose."

Again the impatient, minor bellow rose on the air, and Roger perceived that what he had carelessly passed over as a great sand dune was in reality a square cottage built of sand, apparently, for it was precisely the colour and texture of sand, sloping off in a succession of outbuildings, just as the cliffs and dunes slope, windowless, nearly, from that side at least, and offering only the anxious cow, peering from the furthest outhouse, as evidence of life. Close up to it on one side, the right, a great, cliff-like spur of rock shot up and ran like a wall for fifty feet, then fell away gradually into the sand of the beach which ran up to meet it; the cottage itself was perched on the beach edge, and beyond it, on the left side, the straggling grass began. They moved on toward this house, then, and as they neared it a long, melancholy howl echoed the cow's lament, a howl with a baying, mellow undertone that lingered on the morning air. For it was honest morning now, a September morning, blowing wild-grapes and sea sand and bayberry into Roger's nostrils. As he stared at the house a great hound crept around the corner of it, baying monotonously, but as he saw Margarita he left off and ran to her, arching his brindled head. He was a Danish hound, beautifully brindled and very massive. She fondled him quietly, smiling as he clumsily threw his great paws about her waist, and pushed him down.

"I am very hungry," said Margarita abruptly, "I think I will have Caliban bring me some warm milk."

She turned her direction slightly and made for the cow stall, and as he stood by the door Roger saw that whatever the internal structure of the building might be, it was certainly covered with rough sand.

"Here is Caliban now," she added, and a loutish looking fellow, small-eyed, heavy-lipped and shock-haired, appeared to rise out of the ground before them, dangling a milk pail on his arm. At sight of Margarita his jaw dropped, he shivered violently and appeared ready to faint, but as she called encouragingly to him he mustered courage to approach and feel of her skirt timidly. He was evidently feeble-minded as well as dumb, for with a sort of croak he dropped the bucket and began to dance clumsily up and down, snapping his fingers the while. Plainly he had thought her gone for good and this was his thanksgiving.

"Milk the cow, Caliban, I am thirsty," said Margarita impatiently, after a moment of this, "and get me some bread. Make haste with it."

He started on a run for the door furthest from the cow stall and appeared almost immediately with a large silver mug and a huge piece torn from a loaf. Squatting beside the cow he balanced the mug between his knees and deftly milked it full. She seized it, drained it thirstily and began munching her bread, holding the mug out to him again to be filled a second time. She bit great mouthfuls from the loaf, like a child of four, and Roger watched her, half amused, half irritated.

"You are not accustomed to the exercise of hospitality, I see," he said finally, and as she looked at him over the silver mug inquiringly, he explained.

"I have walked for more than an hour and I am hungry, too, Miss Margarita," he said. "Won't you offer me anything to eat and drink?"

She shook her head doubtfully.

"I need this bread myself," she said, "and no one drinks from this cup but me. I should not like it. If Caliban will get you another . . ."

"Surely he will if you tell him to," Roger suggested mildly.

"Very well," she returned indifferently, "when he has finished milking, I will," and she continued her meal, adding, "I do not think he likes you, for he shows his teeth. He did that when the doctor came to see my father."

I asked Margarita a year or two after this to describe for me how she first entertained Roger: I had already a good idea of his initial hospitality to her in the French restaurant. Here is her letter.

DEAREST JERRY:

What an odd thing to ask me to tell you—my first hospitality to Roger! But I remember it very well. Only it was not very hospitable, because, of course, I did not know anything about that sort of thing. One has to learn that, like finger bowls and asking people if they slept well. You know I called for some bread and milk and ate them very greedily, standing by the cow so that I could get more when I should want it. By the time I had finished, Caliban had finished milking and then Roger asked me quite politely if I thought he might have something to eat now. You know, dear Jerry, I had never been used to eating with people. All the people I knew ate their meals separately and it never occurred to me that I ought to be there when he ate. And then, I was so sleepy—oh, so sleepy! You know I have always felt sleepy and hungry and angry and things like that so much more than other people seem to. I have to sleep and eat when I feel like sleeping and eating. So I only said, "You had better ask Hester to get you a breakfast. I must go to sleep now," and flung myself down on some fresh hay just beside the cow stall, in the sun, and went to sleep! Was not that a dreadful thing to do? But I did it. I do not know how long I slept, nor how Roger looked when I turned my back on him, but when I opened

my eyes he was sitting beside me, smoking a cigar and staring at me. He had been there all the time.

"Did Hester get you a breakfast?" I asked him, stretching myself like a big baby.

"I have not asked her," he said very quietly, "suppose we go in now and see about it, if you are rested."

So we went in, but Hester was not in the kitchen, and when I went up to her room and knocked there was no answer, so I supposed she had gone out for the roots and herbs she used to hunt so much.

"You will have to get it yourself," I told him, "unless Caliban will."

"Are you not willing to do that much for me, then?" he said, and I felt very strange, though I could not explain why. I think now it was because I began to understand that I ought to have done something I had not.

"I would get it for you if I could," I said, "but I do not know how to make a breakfast, nor where Hester keeps her things. Why do you not ask Caliban?"

So then he asked Caliban if he could manage some breakfast for him, but Caliban only stared and walked away.

"Does he understand?" Roger asked me, and I felt that his voice was not the same as it had been.

"I am sure he does," I said. "Will you not do as this man asks you, Caliban?" But he only scowled and turned away.

"You see," I said, "there is nothing to be done until Hester comes." But Roger shook his head and walked over to Caliban.

I am sure he knew it was not that I grudged him food, but that I had no idea at all of how to set about getting it ready. People always have known that what I say is truth, though much of what I say seems to surprise them.

"If you will excuse me," he said, "I will try a slightly different method," and I knew he was very angry. He lifted Caliban in the air by the collar of his coat and gave him several sharp blows on each ear and shook him. Then he threw him away on the floor. Caliban cried like a young dog and sat upon his knees and covered his face. He meant

for Roger to excuse him. I was surprised, for I had always been a little afraid of Caliban.

"Get up," said Roger, very quietly, "and make me some coffee and whatever else you have. And see that you obey me in future."

Caliban hurried about and looked here and there and made some coffee and broke eggs in a black pan and cut pieces of bacon. He set a place at the kitchen table and made some biscuits warm in the oven. Roger ate five eggs and a great many pieces of bacon and six biscuits. He gave me some coffee. When he had finished he drew a long breath and gave Caliban a piece of silver money and Caliban kissed it. Then Roger took another cigar and told Caliban to fetch a match and then he asked me if I would like to walk by the sea for a little.

"I ought to find this Hester of yours," he said, "but I won't just yet. I am too comfortable. Will you come out with me?"

So I said I would, and that was all my hospitality, dear Jerry. I had learned better when you came, had I not? This letter has been so long that I cannot write any more.

Your MARGARITA.

My Margarita! The very words are not like any other two words. I think no woman's name is so purely sweet to the ear, so grateful on the tongue. My Margarita! Alas, alas. . . .

As to that walk by the sea, I have never been able to get any satisfactory account of it. Any, that is, which could hope to prove satisfactory to one who did not know Roger. Such an one might be incredulous, in face of all that had gone before, when assured that Roger paced back and forth on the firm sand, filling his lungs in the clean sea air, puffing his cigar in perfect silence, Margarita at his heels as silent as he, and the big Danish hound at hers, more silent than either. But so it was. To me who know them both, nothing could seem more natural. They were healthy, well-poised animals, well fed, supplied with plenty of fresh air

(a prime necessity to them both) and in congenial company. Neither of them was given to consideration of the past or prognostication of the future; both of them were content. Roger has always had that priceless faculty of reserving mental processes, apparently, until they are necessary. When they are not, he lays them by, as a sportsman lays by his gun, and the teasing, relentless imps that poison the rest of us with futile regrets for the past and vain hopes for the future avoid him utterly. It is the pure Anglo Saxon cornerstone of that great, slow wall which I firmly believe is destined to encircle the world, one day. Your slender, brown peoples with their throbbing, restless brains and curious, trembling fingers may—and doubtless will—build the cathedrals and paint the frescoes therein and write the songs to be sung there; but they must hold their land from Roger and his kind and look to him to guard them safe and unmolested there. Or so it seems to me.

After an hour or so of this walking Caliban approached them, and bending humbly before Roger made it clear that he greatly desired their presence at the cottage. They went after him, Margarita incurious because she was utterly indifferent, Roger wasting no energy, of course, with no facts to proceed upon. At the kitchen he endeavoured to lead them up the narrow stair, and then Margarita asked him if anything was wrong with Hester and if she had sent him.

He nodded his head violently and led her up the stair. In a few moments she returned.

"Hester," she said composedly, "is dead."

"Dead?" Roger echoed in consternation, "are you certain?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "she is cold, just like my father. She is sitting in her chair. Her eyes are open and she is dead."

Rogers stared thoughtfully ahead of him. He never doubted her for a moment. It was always impossible to doubt Margarita.

"I wonder if Caliban will make my breakfast, now?" she added, with a shadow of concern in her voice. "I think he puts more coffee in the pot: I shall be glad of that."

"For heaven's sake," Roger cried sharply, "are you human, child? This woman, if I understand you, has taken care of you from babyhood!"

"Of course," said Margarita, "but I do not like her and she does not like me. She liked my father."

It may seem strange to you that Roger did not immediately ascend the stair and confirm Margarita's report, but he did not. Instead he spoke to Caliban.

"Is the woman dead?" he asked shortly.

The clumsy, slow-witted youth nodded his head and sobbed noisily, with strange animal-like grunts and gulps.

"Has she been dead long, do you think?" Roger asked.

Caliban raised his hand and checked off the five fingers slowly. It was understood that he indicated so many hours. He placed his hand upon his heart, then shook his head from side to side. Suddenly he shifted his features unbelievably and Roger gazed horrified upon a very mask of death: there was no doubt as to what Caliban had seen.

This being so Roger thought a moment and then spoke.

"I am very sleepy, Margarita," he said, "and I don't care to walk back to the village directly, since it would do no especial good. I think I will take a little nap on the beach, if you don't mind, and then I'll go to the village and get help to—to do the various things that must be done. Later I will have a talk with you. Tell me once again—you do not know of any friends or relatives of your father's or Hester's?"

She shook her head, carelessly but definitely.

"Does Caliban?"

But this question was beyond the poor lout's intelligence; he could only blubber and fend off possible chastisement.

"Take another nap, if you can, Margarita," said Roger, "and I will go to the beach. Call me if you want me."

She went off to her warm straw, threw herself on it like a tired child, and passed quickly into a deep sleep; he tramped for a moment on the beach, then stretched himself in the lee of a sun-warmed rock and fell into the dreamless, renewing rest that he took as his simple due from nature.

CHAPTER VI

FATE CASTS HER DIE

WHEN he woke it was full sunset. The lonely reefs were red with it (O Margarita, well I know that hour! Do you remember our talks?) the point of land seemed drowned in it, and with a sense of something inexcusably forgotten and put off, Roger hurried to the house that stood strangely deserted, it seemed, in the dying glow. In just that glow I have watched it, leaning on my oars, and for a few strange minutes, the exact time necessary for the sun to drop behind the coast-hills, I have felt myself a small boy again, crouched in a cane chair before my mother's sewing-table, unable for very terror to drop my feet to the floor as I gazed through wide eyes at the House of Usher, that home of sunset mystery. Such a strange, Poe-like atmosphere could that sanded, secret cottage take upon itself.

Roger pushed rapidly up the beach and entered the house quietly, so quietly that he caught Margarita's last sentences, which struck him as odd even in his utter ignorance of their connection. She was evidently scolding Caliban, for his grunts and shufflings punctuated her pauses.

"It is very saucy and unkind of you, Caliban," she was saying, "and you need not think you can do as you like because Hester is dead. I know she can not walk any more. My father could not walk when he was dead. And you need not think that Roger Bradley will not ask, because he will. He knows everything."

Roger thought that the lout had been teasing her with stupid ghost hints and bade him begone sternly, more vexed than before as he noticed the dim twilight drawing in and

realised how late and inconvenient the hour was for all he had to do.

"Can you get me a lantern, Margarita?" he said shortly. "I must get back to the village and try to bring someone out with me to see about the—all the matters that must be attended to—upstairs."

"Upstairs?" she repeated, "what matters?" He blessed her indifference then, and explained as gently as he could the necessity for some disposition of her old housekeeper's body.

"Oh! Hester," she returned, "you cannot do anything to Hester, Roger Bradley, for she has gone."

"Gone," he echoed stupidly.

"Go and see," said Margarita, pointing to the stairway, and he took the steps two at a time. The room that she indicated faced the stairs directly. It was furnished plainly with an ugly wooden bed covered with a bright patchwork quilt, a pine bureau and two cheap chairs. The walls were utterly bare and the floor, but for a woven rug near the bed, of the sort so common in New England. And yet there was an air of homely occupation in the plain chamber, a bright, patched cushion in one chair, a basket full of household mending and such matters, on a small table, a pair of spectacles and a worn Bible beside it. The room had that unmistakable air of recent occupation, that subtle atmosphere of use and wont that no art can simulate—and yet it was empty.

Roger came down the stairs again and summoned Caliban. The fellow lay in a deep sleep, just as he had thrown himself, on the straw beside the cow stall, a full pail of milk beside him. It was hard to wake him, for he scowled and snored and dropped heavily off again after each shaking, but at last he stood conscious before them and appeared to understand Roger's sharp questions well enough, though his only answer was a clumsy twist of his large head and a dismal negative sort of grunt.

Where was Hester's body? Was she really dead? Had anyone been in the house? What had he been doing all the afternoon? One might as well have asked the great hound in the doorway. Even to threats of violence he was dumb, cowering, it is true, but hopelessly and with no attempt to escape whatever penalty his obstinacy might incur.

Roger fell into a perplexed silence and the lout dropped back snoring on his straw.

"I do not see why we came back from Broadway," Margarita observed placidly. "I did not want to, you remember, and now Caliban is too sleepy to get our supper. We shall have to have more bread and milk. Let us eat it on the rocks, Roger Bradley, will you?"

And Roger, in spite of the fact that he was forty and a conspicuously practical person (or was it, perhaps just *because* of this fact? I confess I am not quite sure!) actually left that house of mystery carrying a yellow earthen pitcher of milk, a crusty loaf of new bread, a great slice of sage cheese and a blueberry pie, followed by Margarita and the Danish hound, Margarita prattling of Broadway, the dog licking her hand, Roger, I have no sort of doubt, intent on conveying the food in good order to its destination!

They sat on the rocks, warm yet with the September sun, and ate with a healthy relish, while the first pale stars came out and the incoming tide lapped the smooth beach. I have been assured that they never in the conversation that followed mentioned the island—though it was not then an island, to be sure—that they were sitting upon, nor the extraordinary events which had happened there and had brought them to it. And I believe it. I also believe, and do not need to be assured, that they talked little of anything. They never did. Again and again I have imparted to Roger some or other of Margarita's amazing conversations with me and he has listened to them with the grave interest of a stranger and even questioned me indolently as to my theory of that stage of her development. I must add that he

has never seemed surprised at what she said and has occasionally corrected me in my analyses and prophecies with an acuteness that has astonished me, for he was never by way of being analytic, our Roger. When I once remarked to Clarence King (who was devoted to her) apropos of this silence of theirs that it was like the quiet intimacy of the animals, he looked at me deeply for a moment, then added, "Or the angels, maybe?" which, like most of King's remarks, bears thinking of, dear fellow. I never heard him in my life talk so brilliantly as he did one afternoon stretched on the sand by Margarita, while she fed him wild strawberries from her lap and embroidered the most beautiful butterfly on the lapel of his old velveteen jacket, and Roger tried to ride in on the breakers like the South Sea Islanders.

From time to time Clarence would turn one of those luminous sentences of his and kiss the stained finger tips that fed him (I never did that in my life) and from time to time Roger's splendid tanned body would rise between us and the sun, triumphant on his board or ignominiously flat between the great combers. But he was as calm as the tide and we knew that he would beat it in the end and "get the hang of it" as he promised. She never turned her eyes toward him, that I could see, but I am convinced that she was perfectly aware each time he fell. She never talked much to King and he was always a little jealous of me on that account. But she was very fond of him and always wrote to him when he was off on his ramblings. His letters to her were always in rhyme, the cleverest possible.

There are, of course, whole pages to be written—if one wanted to write them—of that night on the rocks. I naturally don't want to write them. To say that I have not imagined them would be a stupid lie; I am human. But I have never been able to bring myself to the point of view of the modern lady novelist in these matters. Why is it, by the way, that God has hidden so many things in these latter days from the prudent and revealed them unto spinsters?

Not that I need to rely on my imagination: Margarita would have saved me that. Once she got the idea that I was interested in those early days, she was perfectly willing to draw upon her extraordinary memory for all the details I could endure. But of course I could not let her. The darling imbecile—could anything have been so hopelessly enchanting as Margarita? It is impossible. If you can picture to yourself a boy—but that is misleading, directly, when I think of her curled close against me on the rocks, her hand on my arm and all my veins tingling under it. She was all woman. And yet who but me who knew her can ever have heard from the lips of any woman such absolute naïveté, such crystal frankness? It was like those dear talks with some lovely, loved and loving child. But that, again, gives you no proper idea. For no child's throat sounds such deep, bell-like tones, such sweet, swooping cadences. And no child's eyes meet yours with that clear beam, only to soften and tremble and swim suddenly with such alluring tenderness that your heart shakes in you and slips out to drown contentedly in those slate-blue depths. No, no, there is no describing Margarita. Perhaps King came nearest to it when he said that she was Eve before the fall, plus a sense of humour! But Eve is distinctly Miltonian to us (unfortunately for the poor woman) and Margarita would have horrified Milton—there is no doubt of it.

Well, well, I left them on the moonlit rocks, and there I had better leave them, I suppose. It is so hard for me to make you understand that Roger was incapable of anything low, when I am apparently doing my best to catalogue actions that can be set only too easily in an extremely doubtful light. All I can say is, pick out the best fellow you know, the one you'd rather have to count on, at a pinch, than another, the one you'd swear to for doing the straight thing and holding his tongue about it—then give him five feet eleven and a half inches and blue eyes and you've Roger. This is rather a poor dodge at character

drawing: I know a competent author would never throw himself on your mercy so.

But then, what does it matter? When the members of a man's own household, who have known him from boyhood, fail to understand him and take a satiric pleasure in looking at what he does from the nastiest possible standpoint (none the less nasty because it is a logically possible standpoint) why should I, a confessed amateur, hope to make Roger clear to you if you are determined to misjudge him?

I find myself still a little sore on this point: unnecessarily so, you may be thinking. But you never had to explain it to the family in Boston, you see—and Sarah. I had. I can see her cold, grey-green eyes to this hour, her white starched shirt and her sharp steel belt buckle—ugh! It should be illegal, in a Republic where there are so many less sensible laws, for any woman to be so ostentatiously unattractive. . . .

"Margarita," I said once, very soon after I had met her, "were you ever caught by the tide on those first rocks? See how it has crept up and cut them off."

"Oh yes, often," she answered, "the first night Roger ever came here, for once. Do you not remember, I told you how he carried the blueberry pie and the milk out there and we ate them? He was so hungry! It was then that he looked at me so——"

"Blueberry pie," I said hastily, "is very messy, I think, though undoubtedly good. It makes one's mouth so black."

"I know," she murmured reminiscently, "I told Roger that his mouth was stained and I laughed at him. And then he said that mine was worse, because there was some on my chin—why do you scowl so, Jerry? Is that a wrong thing to tell?"

"No, no," I assured her, "of course not."

"I am glad," she said comfortably, "it is very strange that I cannot see the difference, myself. How do you see, Jerry? But I was telling you about the tide, was I not? When Roger said that about my mouth I tried to get the

stain off, but I could not, and then Roger said it was no use trying any more and he kissed me."

Here Margarita paused and patted my hand, tapping each finger nail lightly with her own finger-tips.

"You need not be afraid, Jerry," she added encouragingly, "I shall not tell any more things about that."

I drew away my hand irritably. "Well, well, what about the tide?" I said.

Margarita's repulsed fingers lay loosely upcurled on her knees, which she hunched in front of her, like a boy.

"Oh, it was only what you asked me, dear Jerry," she answered softly, "while Roger was kissing me that kiss, the tide *did* come in!"

CHAPTER VII

I RIDE KNIGHT ERRANT

It is easy to see that I should have made a poor novelist; it has been hard enough for me to give you any idea of scenes I did not myself witness, even though I had Roger and Margarita to help me out and an intimate knowledge of both of them, and when I try to fancy myself composing a tissue of fictitious events "all out of my head," as the children say, my pen drops weakly out of my fingers, in horror at the very thought.

But now, thank heaven, the pull is over. From now on, I need tell only what I knew and saw, in the strange, interwoven life we three have led. Three only? Nay, Harriet of the true heart, Harriet of the tender hand, could we have been three without you? My fingers should wither before they left your name unwritten.

I remember so well the night the telegram came. I had been vexed all day. Everything had gone wrong. Roger, to meet whom I had come back early to town, had neither turned up nor sent me any message; the day had been sickeningly hot, with that mid-September heat that comes to the Eastern States after the first crisp days and wilts everything and everybody. I found my rooms atrociously stale and dusty, and worse than that, perfectly useless, since by some miracle of carelessness I had left my keys behind me at the shore and hadn't so much as a clean collar to look forward to.

The club valet assured me that he had received no call for trunk or bag, but that Roger had assuredly not entered the house for five days. I went into his rooms, but they told me nothing, and I, worse luck, should have been lost in his

collar, so I glared angrily at the drawers of linen, wired for my own keys and made for the Turkish bath. There with a thrill of delight I discovered a complete change of clothing; I had, before leaving for the summer, jumped hastily into dinner things, leaving a heap of forgotten garments behind me and they awaited me now, trim and creased, russet shoes polished, and a wine-colored tie, a particular favourite of mine, topping the fresh linen. It seems absurd, but I recall few moments in my life of such pure, heartfelt thanksgiving. The very colour of life seemed changed for me. I wonder if we do well in despising these small thrills as we do? Surely enough of them sedulously preserved in grateful memory must equal in intensity those great, theoretical moments we all regard as our due but so often pass through life, I am sure, without experiencing.

However that may be, the little gratifications of that evening are graven in my mind, undoubtedly, you will say, because of the startling climax for which they were preparing me. The clean tingling of my soapy scrub, the delicious coolness of the plunge, the leisurely, fresh dressing all caressed my nerves delightfully. In the plunge a pleasant enough fellow had accosted me and we had splashed together contentedly. I expected to recall his name every moment, for his face was vaguely familiar, but I could not, and when we met in the hall and went down the steps together, it still escaped me. We hesitated a bit on the pavement, and then before I realised it we were hailing a hansom and bound for dinner together.

It was a pleasant drive up along the river, for a little breeze had sprung up and the watered asphalt smelt cool. We were both comfortably hungry and very placid after our bath and we chatted in a desultory sort of way, I, amused at my utter inability to place the fellow, he quite unconscious, of course, and perfectly certain of me. He asked after Roger, sympathised with our failure to make connections, remarked to my surprise that he had only been out of town for his

Sundays (America had not adopted the "week-end" at that time) and asked me, I remember, if I knew anything about a game called basket-ball. It seemed he was anxious to find someone who did. We drew up at last to our white, glistening little table looking out over the water, looked about for possible friends, nodded to the head-waiter and ordered our dinner. It turned out that neither of us had yet celebrated the oyster month, and leaving my unknown to bespeak the blue points, for the more conservative among us clung to the smaller oyster then, I telephoned the club to let Roger know where to find me in case he should appear there.

Over the soup my companion got on to the subject—somehow—of evolution, and talked about it very ably indeed. It is absurd, but I shall never be able to eat jellied consommé as long as I live without connecting it with the Saurian Period! I remember that those quaint and apparently highly important beasts lasted well into our guinea-chick and lettuce-hearts, and I can see him now, his eager, dark face all lighted with enthusiasm while he spread mayonnaise neatly over the crimson quarters of tomato on his plate, and made short nervous mouthfuls, in order to talk the better. Half amused, half interested I listened, trying to place the fellow, but for the life of me I could not. Was he a scientist, a lecturer, a magazine writer, a schoolmaster? We finished with some Port du Salut and Bar-le-duc—an admitted weakness of mine—and I had decided to regularly pump him and find out his name without his guessing my game, when he began as I supposed, to help me out.

"Heavens!" he said with compunction, "you'll think me an awful bore, Jerrolds, but I've been more or less practising on you, haven't I? But you'll remember, perhaps, this used to be a sort of hobby of mine, and I work it into shape nowadays for a young men's club I'm running."

I yawned and lit a cigar and we sipped our coffee in silence. The plates rattled around us, the curaçoa in my tiny glass

smelled sweet and strong, everything was natural, easy, well fed and well groomed (as the phrase goes now) about me, the day and hour were like any other; and yet from that moment on my life was never to be quite the same, for surprise and change were hurrying toward me, and the man opposite—how curiously!—was to be drawn into the wide net that fate had sunk for me and must have even then been preparing to draw smoothly and effectively to the surface.

We think, when we are young, that we live alone. I recall, as a boy of twenty, certain hot-headed, despairing midnight walks when the horror of my hopeless, unapproachable, unreachable identity surged over me in melancholy waves. Heavens! I would have plunged into a monastery if I had believed that any sort of prayer and fasting could bring me close—really close—to God; for to any human creature, I had learned, I could never be close. After that, we grow into that curious stage of irresponsibility which we deduce from this loneliness, and distress our patient relatives with windy explanations of "matters that concern ourselves alone." And later still, if we have the right kind of women about us, some faint idea of the twisted net we weave—you and I and the other fellow, all together, whether we will or no—comes to us, and we stare awhile and then . . . shrug our shoulders or bend our knees or set our jaws, according as we are made.

I like to believe, now, that a dim idea of what was going to happen was in some mysterious way growing on me before I got the telegram. I am certain that when the head-waiter touched my arm and told me I was wanted at the telephone, a curious oppression fell over my hitherto contented after-dinner spirit which grew into a kind of excitement as I made my way to the booth. And yet I expected nothing more than to hear Roger's voice with some reasonable explanation of his failure to meet me. It was the night porter, however, reading me a telegram missent to the shore and returned to the club.

"Shall I read it, sir?"

"Yes, Richard, let's have it."

He mumbled the name of a place I had never heard of and went on in the peculiarly expressionless style consecrated to messages, thus transmitted.

"*Please bring bag of clothes and razors here will meet train arriving four thirty Tuesday bring sensible parson don't fail. Roger.*"

I stared at the receiver stupidly. This was Wednesday.

"That's crazy, Richard," I stammered finally, "bring what? Read it again."

"It's quite plain, sir, except the town," and again the strange message reached me.

"Well," I managed to get out, "it's clear he wants clothes, anyway. Tell Hodgson to pack a complete change for Mr. Bradley and his razors. And see if you can find the name of the place from the chief operator and the correct message. It can't be parson, of course. And look up the next train for that place, if you can, Richard. I'll be down there directly."

I puffed hard at my dying cigar and went slowly back to the veranda, trying to make sense of that telegram.

"No bad news, I hope?" my companion inquired kindly, for I suppose I looked worried.

"No," I said slowly, "only an idiotic sort of telegram from Roger. He wants me to meet him at some place or other at present unknown, and to bring him his razors and a sensible parson."

My unknown friend burst into a chuckle of laughter.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "you get the razors and I'll attend to the parson end of it. Any special denomination?"

I paid for our dinner (he had insisted upon paying the cab) and gathered up my hat and stick.

"It's absurd," I went on, "perhaps he meant 'person,' though what's the point in that? Anyhow I must start directly. There may be a night train. Would you rather stop here a while?"

"No, no, let me see you through," he said good-naturedly, "I'm interested. Perhaps he's going to fight a duel with the razors and wants the parson for the other fellow! Perhaps he's made a bet to shave a parson. Perhaps——"

But I was in no mood for joking. The telegram, so unlike Roger, and yet so unmistakably his, in a way—I have often noted a curious characteristic quality in telegrams—worried me. I wished I had got it in time to make the train he mentioned. I wished I were in that mysterious town. Suppose he had depended on me for it? Suppose he needed me?

We drove down in silence. My man got out with me at the club and smiled at the Gladstone the porter held out to me.

"There are the razors, anyhow," he said.

Richard had the name of the town for me, too (the town I prefer not to tell you) and the next train that would make it: it left in fifteen minutes.

"And it *is* parson, sir—p-a-r-s-o-n: there's no mistake. Shall I call you a cab, sir?"

I bit through my cigar with irritation.

"In heaven's name," I cried, "how am I to get a sensible parson in fifteeen minutes? In the first place, I don't believe there is such a thing!"

"Hold on, there," said my friend suddenly, "there is, Jerrolds, for I'm one, and you know it!"

I started at him. Who in the devil was he? Instinctively I began an apology.

"I—I didn't recall at the moment——"

"Between you and me," he cut me short, "I'm just as well pleased that you didn't, Jerrolds! The sooner we get through with all this white choker and black coat business, the sooner we'll amount to something, in my way of thinking. Well, seriously—will I do? Do you know anybody better? Because I'll go, if you don't."

I grasped his offered hand.

"Heaven bless you," I thought, "whoever you are!" and,

"All right," I said shortly, "it's very kind of you. We'll have to hurry, I'm afraid."

We had just time to jump for the last platform. I remember apostrophising the Gladstone rather strongly as I fell on its metal clasp, and glancing apologetically at my companion, but he was tactfully deaf, and we found a seat together, by good luck, and settled down for our hot and tiresome night.

I couldn't very well ask his name by that time, it would have been too absurd. I trusted to Roger to get me out of that difficulty, for he knew Roger, evidently, and me too, though not very well, I judged. He certainly wasn't in my college class, for it would have come up, I was sure, in our talk. Not that we talked much. It was a stuffy, disagreeable ride, and I was alternately vexed with Roger and worried about him. In a hopelessly foolish manner I connected the razors and the parson, too closely for any reasonable inference in regard to the latter. I knew the connection was ridiculous but it was persistent, and as I had lost all hope of placing the man sitting beside me, my mind was altogether in a horrid muddle. Once he asked me abruptly if Roger were an Episcopalian.

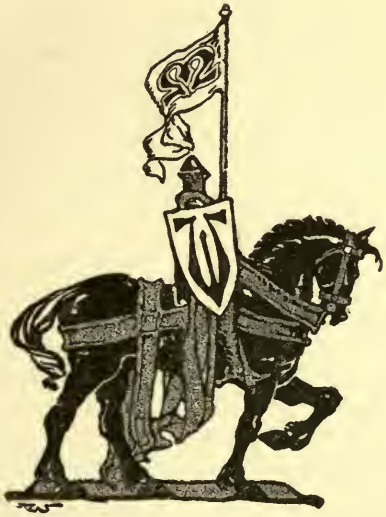
"No," I answered, "he—his people are Unitarians."

"I'm a Congregationalist, as you know, of course," he went on, "but if it makes no more difference to Roger than it will to me, there'll be no trouble."

"Anyone would suppose he was going to christen Roger," I thought disgustedly and returned to my troublesome thoughts, replying absently that it would be all right, of course.

We changed cars at S—— and got into a queer little local train filled with young village roughs, whose noisy horseplay annoyed me exceedingly. My mysterious parson, however, was deeply interested in them and related incident after incident in proof of what could be accomplished with this offensive part of the rural population by social organisation

under competent direction. He even got out an old letter and proved to me on the back of it, with a stub of a pencil, what a pitiful outlay in money was sufficient to start a practical boys' club, including the rent of a second-hand piano, to be purchased ultimately on the instalment plan. In the midst of this lecture (it was no less) I fell asleep, uncomfortably and rudely, and it was he who shook me awake at last and carried the bag out of the close car.



CHAPTER VIII

THE MISTS OF EDEN

THE station lights flared pale in the coming dawn. Behind the barred window of the ticket-office, which contained, as its bright lamp showed, a tumbled cot bed and a dilapidated arm-chair, a tousled young man sat playing Patience in his nightshirt on the telegraph table. We battered on his window, and to our amazement he nodded casually and entirely without surprise at us, reached into a corner of his littered room, grasped a pair of oars, and, pushing up the window, poked them out at us between the bars.

"Mr. Jerrolds, I guess," he remarked. "Mr. Bradley's left the boat for you at the foot of the dock, little ways across the track there. It's kind of a blue boat. You just sight the two reefs and the bell buoy and when you're just opposite of the buoy, turn about and make for the shore. There's a white pole where you land."

"Have you been sitting up—" I began, but he cut me short impatiently.

"No, I have insomnia—it's something dreadful the way I have it," he explained. "I'm always sitting up."

I accepted the oars mechanically.

"And where is Mr. Bradley stopping?" I asked.

"Why, over to Miss Prynne's. He met the afternoon train yest'day and the deaf an' dumb feller rowed over to-day, and when you didn't turn up he left the oars. I tell you, he knows more'n you might think, to look at him."

"Was—is Mr. Bradley well?" I asked.

"He looked to be well enough yest'day," said the insomniac indifferently, "big feller, ain't he?"

I shouldered the oars, and followed by my sensible parson with the bag, made for the untidy wharf through the silent village. The blue boat was not hard to discover in the pale, ghostly light; the bay was hardly rippled; it was to be another hot, sticky day. My companion begged the privilege of the oars.

"My old game, you know," he added apologetically, and swept us out on the black, mysterious water with beautiful, clean strokes. He had soon marked down the buoy and was regretting that it would be only a matter of twenty minutes before we must land.

"Do you know," he added with a boyish sort of smile, "all this is a real adventure to me, Jerrolds, and I can't help enjoying it. It can't be serious, you see—Roger's well. Perhaps"—and he shot a curious glance at me—"perhaps he's going to be married!"

I laughed a little stiffly. It was difficult to explain to this sensible parson that Bradleys did not marry in this fashion; it wasn't quite complimentary to him. Moreover I didn't know whether he would be sensible enough to understand what two or three of Roger's friends knew very well—that he was unlikely to marry so long as Sue Paynter remained above ground. It had been simple enough, that affair: Sue and Roger had been engaged ten years before the time of which I am writing, they were within a few months of the wedding, and Frederick Paynter, her cousin, had come back from Germany, playing Chopin like a demi-god, and had whirled her off her feet in a fortnight. She broke off the engagement in a rather cruel way, it seemed to me—by telephone—and Roger hung up the receiver (I myself heard him answer slowly, "Very well, dear. I see. Good-bye.") and went to Algiers with me. When we came back they were married and he was having a great success, playing before Royalty and all that sort of thing.

I think it took Sue about a month to find out what any of her men friends could have told her in six seconds, and after that she kept him in Europe as much as she could. She kept up pretty well for three or four years, but at last she came back with her two delicate babies and satisfied everybody's sense of propriety by nursing Frederick while he stayed in America and dining out with him twice a season before he returned to Europe. It was all very regrettable and Sarah would discuss it in her tactful way from time to time till, if I had been Roger, I should have choked her. Sue would not listen to a separation, even, and insisted that Frederick sent her plenty of money, which Roger invested for her, and old Madam Bradley had her often with them in Boston. Roger never discussed it; he didn't need to. But I never knew him to be out of Boston or New York if the Paynters were there together, and I remarked that he invariably left word where he could be reached, day or night, when Frederick was playing a series of concerts.

All this ran through my mind as we cut through the water and the sky grew paler by degrees and the stars faded out. We were opposite the buoy now, dark amongst the dark waves, and we turned at right angles and made for the shore. The tide was high and we glided over the inner reef easily. Soon we could see the eaves of the cottage dimly, a cock crowed sleepily, the white pole pointed out some rough steps cut in the rocks ahead.

That sudden sense of excitement grew in me again, a nervous longing to get hold of Roger, to get away from my oarsman, for I was worried out of all reason. He, to my satisfaction, at this moment proposed a separation.

"I haven't had half enough of this," he said suddenly, "why don't you land, Jerrolds, if you feel you ought to—though I don't see how we can descend on Miss Prynne or anybody else at this unearthly hour—and I'll pull about for a while? I don't doubt you'd rather see Roger alone, anyhow, at first. When you want me, just give me a hail—

I won't be far. And tell him to have plenty of breakfast, will you?"

I agreed warmly to this and clambered up the slippery steps, still possessed by the same muffled excitement. The beach was hard as a floor under me and I almost ran along it toward the sanded cottage. The merest glance at it showed that no one watched there; the windows were dark. I skirted the rocky wall that protected its back and sides; no one was stirring in stable or outhouse. On the shore side a straggling grass stretch ran down to a sheltered, inland bay; a fair sized vegetable garden, glistening with dew, and a few fruit trees gave a domestic air to the place, utterly unguessed from the forbidding sea front. I wandered toward this little bay and sat in a delightful natural chair of rock to wait for the sunrise.

I must have lost myself for a few minutes, for when I opened my eyes everything before them was changed, as completely as the scene shifters change a stage picture. The little bay was crowded with rolling seas of white, thick mist, like an Alpine lake. Billow on billow it rolled in, faintly luminous here and there, breaking as smoke breaks, on the beach. As I stared, lost in the beauty of it, two great gold arrows from the sun behind me cut into the thickest of it and tore it like a curtain, and in the rent appeared two human figures, walking as it might be on clouds to earth. More than mortal tall they loomed in the mist, and no marbles I have ever seen—not even that Wonder of Melos—is so immortally lovely as they were. The woman wore a veil of crimson vine-leaves that wound about her hips and dropped on one side nearly to her knee, around the man's neck a great lock of her long hair lay loose and on his head a rough wreath of the red leaves shone in the arrow of sunlight. Beside them a monstrous hound appeared suddenly: a trailing vine dripped like blood from his great jowl.

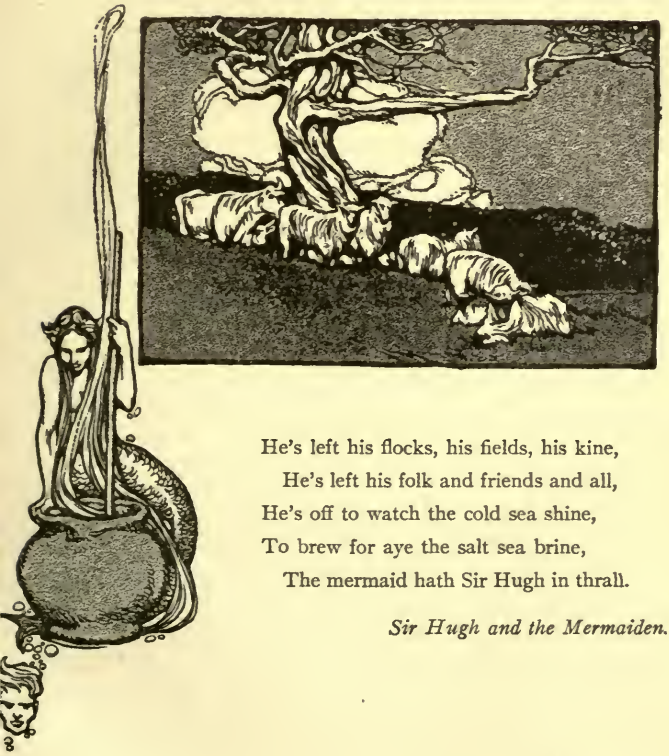
I could not have told what she looked like to save my life: she was what the world means when it says woman—beau-

tiful, certainly, but no one person. One arm was on his shoulder, the other hand lay on the animal's head; the mist covered their feet and they appeared as aerial, as unreal as figures in some Assumption. But they were not through with earth, not they: they were humanity triumphant—the very crown and flower of creation. They came up from the sea with the grave, contented smile of the old gods on their faces. Nature, working patiently at her Saurians, had had this in her mind from the beginning, and I believed in that moment that God had indeed allowed her to perfect her last work in His image! For perhaps three heart-beats I saw them there, framed in the luminous mist, and then it rolled over them, swiftly, silently, and wiped them out, and I stumbled from the rock-seat and ran back across the beach, a great lump stiffening my throat and a hard, frightened jealousy nearly stifling me, to my shame and surprise.

For I had known Roger twenty-five years and yet I had never had the least idea of the man!

PART THREE

IN WHICH THE STREAM JOINS WITH OTHERS AND PLUNGES DOWN A CLIFF



He's left his flocks, his fields, his kine,
He's left his folk and friends and all,
He's off to watch the cold sea shine,
To brew for aye the salt sea brine,
The mermaid hath Sir Hugh in thrall.

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER IX

MARGARITA MEETS THE ENEMY AND HE IS HERS

I FLUNG myself down on the beach behind a big rock, so that I was completely cut off from the cottage, and stared at the sun rising, though it might as well have been the moon for all my appreciation of it. So this was it! No wonder he wanted a parson—it was high time, I thought virtuously. It cut me that he had never hinted this to me; that we, who had had no secrets from each other for so many years (as I thought) had really been divided by this, for what I inferred had been a long time. And yet a moment's consideration brought home to me the almost certainty that it couldn't have been so very long, after all. There had been, especially in the last year, weeks and even months when Roger and I had not been separated for eight hours at a stretch. He chose to work hard in the typical American fashion; I was obliged to. And I knew his attitude toward the sort of *liaison* we both despised. He had laboured enough and disgustedly enough at dragging a weak-kneed cousin of his (the black sheep that few large families dispense with) out of a connection of that kind. And anyhow, I knew that people who wore when they were together the look I had seen on those two visions of the mist could never be contented apart!

Well, well, it was a bad quarter of an hour for me, and I had to get over it as best I could, alone. Women are usually credited with a practical monopoly of jealousy of their own sex, but wrongly, I am sure. We learn earlier to conceal it and, better still, realise the necessity for keeping quiet about it and getting over it. The clock continues to strike, and

one's friends continue to marry, and one continues to present silver mugs to one's god-children—*voilà tout*!

I suppose the worry and strain of it all, the hot, stuffy, sleepless night and the sudden shock at the last had tired me, for as I lay on the beach, sheltered by the rock, with just enough of the warm sun at my back for comfort, I went off into a doze and lost myself completely. I may have slept two hours, and woke with that perfectly definite sensation of some one's being by and staring at me that disturbs one's deepest dreams.

Sitting Turk fashion on the sand near me was a beautiful young woman with great deep set grey eyes and two braids of long dark hair, one falling over either shoulder. Her skin was dark, nearly olive, and her mouth was of that deep, dark red that has always seemed to me so much more alluring than all the coral lips of poetry and convention. She was oddly attired in a short, faded blue serge skirt and a dull red jacket of the sort called at that sartorial epoch a "jersey." Tied around the neck of this was a black silk handkerchief. Black stockings, generously displayed, and worn white tennis shoes completed her costume—a trying one, certainly, and, one would have supposed, sufficiently prejudicial in my eyes, who have always had a confessed preference for the charm of well-selected clothes, and a certain critical judgment in that direction, I am told.

But Margarita would have moulded a suit of chain-armour, I believe, to her personality. It was quite obvious that she wore no corset, for the tight jersey clung to her round, firm bust and long, supple waist like a glove. Her shoulders were, perhaps, a little shade squared, which only added to the boyishness of the enchanting pose of her head, and the loose handkerchief gave the last touch to the daintily hardy fisher girl she seemed to have chosen for her masquerade. For there was nothing of the peasant about her; race showed in every feature, and the dim, toned colours of her faded clothes appeared the last touch of realistic art.

"You must wake, now," she said gravely, "and tell me if you are Jerry—are you?"

"Yes," I said, "I am. And you are——?"

"I am Margarita," she said. "Did you bring some one who knows how to marry people? Roger said you would."

"I brought him—he's out there," I answered, pointing to the ocean generally.

She followed my arm with interest in her eyes. "Oh! Is that where he will do it?" she asked. "Roger did not tell me that. Is he swimming?"

"I think not," I answered seriously, "I think he is in a boat."

"I am glad of that," she remarked, "because I cannot swim, myself. And I must be with Roger, you know, when we are being married."

"It is usual," I admitted. I was really only half aware of the extraordinary character of our conversation. Every one became primitive in talking with Margarita and fell, more or less, into her style of discourse.

"Have you been married?" she asked placidly, her grave, lovely eyes full on mine. She sat quite motionless, her hands loose in her lap, neither twiddling them aimlessly nor pretending to employ them in the hundred nervous ways common to her sex.

"No."

"Neither have I. Neither has Roger. But many people have. It cannot be hard."

"Oh, no! I believe it is the simplest thing in the world," I said, eyeing her narrowly. Was she teasing me? I wondered.

"So Roger says," she agreed with obvious relief. "It is only talking. I cannot see why Roger could not learn to do it himself. Can you not do it, either?"

I shook my head. I was trying to believe that she was not quite sane, but it was impossible. Her mind, I could have sworn, was as vigourous as my own, though there was a

difference, evidently. The precise, beautiful articulation of her English gave me a new direction. She must be a foreigner—Italian, for choice, in spite of her English eyes.

"Marrying people is a business like any other, Miss—I did not hear your last name?" I ventured.

"I have none," she said. "I mean," correcting herself, "Roger says that I must have one, of course, but I do not happen to have heard it," she added calmly.

"Ah, well," I said coldly, "it is a mere detail."

I was seriously vexed with Roger. This young woman passed belief. I decided that she was an actress of the first water and resented being imposed upon.

"It is the same with my age—how old I am," she continued. "Roger thinks I am twenty years of age. Do you? He is going to ask you."

"Really, I can't say," I returned shortly, "I am a poor judge of women's ages—or characters," I added pointedly.

She did not blush nor move. Only her eyes widened slightly and darkened.

"Roger will ask you," she repeated and I felt, unreasonably, as it seemed to me then, that my tone had hurt her, as one's tone, utterly incomprehensible as the words it utters may be, will hurt a child.

She sat in silence for a moment, and I, curiously eager for her next remark and conscious suddenly of that strange, muffled excitement that had oppressed me a few hours before, watched her closely, gathering handfuls of sand and spilling them over my knee.

"Did you ever go to Broadway?" she began again.

"I have, yes."

"I did, too," she assured me eagerly. "I think it is beautiful. I should like to live there, should not you? Perhaps," hopefully, "you do live there?"

"No," I said, still on my guard and uncomfortable, "I don't. Are you planning to live there after you are married?" She shook her head regretfully.

"I am afraid not," she said, and her voice dropped a full third and coloured with a most absurd and exquisite sombre quality, as Duse's used to in *La Dame aux Camellias*. "Roger would not want to. He will not want me to walk there very much, either. And that is very strange, because there is where I first saw him. But there are places I shall like quite as well, he says, and he will take me there. Will you come, too?"

"I am afraid," I replied drily, "that I might be a little *de trop*, perhaps. Roger might not care for my society under those circumstances."

Again she answered my tone rather than my words.

"Roger loves you," she said simply.

"He used to," I returned—inexcusably. Oh, yes! utterly inexcusably.

Again her eyes widened and grew dark, and this time the corners of her mouth curved down pitifully, and I felt a strange heaviness at my heart.

"You do not love me, do you, Jerry?" she said, and now her voice dropped a good fifth and thrilled like the plucked string of a violoncello, and my nerves vibrated to it and tingled in my wrists.

"Roger said you would, and I thought you would—and you do not," she said sadly.

I clenched a handful of the moist sand and leaned toward her, my heart pounding furiously.

"Are you sorry?" I muttered unsteadily, fixing my eyes on hers.

She met them fully. Like great grey pools they were, her eyes, honest as mountain springs, clear as rain. They caught me and held me and drenched me in their innocent, warm sweetness; there was not one thought in her head, not one corner in her heart that I was not free to know. Those eyes had never held a secret since they opened into a world that had never, to her knowledge, deceived her. They swam in light, and oh, the depths on depths of love that one could

sound there! My last hateful anchor broke clean off and my heart slipped from the stupid rocks of suspicion and self-protection and jealousy, and floated away on the bosom of that sweet, disturbing flood. I forgot Roger, I forgot what had been myself; in that instant, in the utter surrender of her innocent eyes, she became for me all at once the vision I had seen in the mist again, the thing we mean when we say woman—but now she was one single special woman, the vision and the flesh-and-blood reality together.

"Are you sorry?" I said again, and my voice was not my own.

She smiled at me till I caught my breath. "Not now, Jerry," she said softly, "because you do love me, now."

The sand fell, a tightly moulded shape, out of my hand, and I wrenched my eyes away from her. They smarted and stung, but the pain relieved me and cleared my brain, and I knew suddenly what I have known ever since and shall know till I die. There on the beach, before I had so much as touched her hand, I had fallen senselessly and hopelessly and everlastingly in love with Margarita.

CHAPTER X

FATE SPREADS AN ISLAND FEAST

I DON'T know how long we sat silent on the beach. Such silence was never embarrassing to her, because it seemed perfectly normal and usual, and I was too busy with my thoughts to feel any sense of restraint. And yet they were hardly thoughts: my head whirled in a confusion of regret and desire, and one moment my blood ran warm with the joy of my discovery, and the next a horrid chill crept over me as I saw my empty years—for if she might not fill them, no one else should. At last I drew a long breath.

"Are you hungry?" Margarita asked pleasantly. "When I am hungry I do that very often. If you will come now, we will have our breakfast."

She sprang to her feet with the lithe ease of a boy and held out her hand to me. I took it and we walked thus across the beach to the cottage, and during that walk, with her firm, warm hand fast in mine and her clean, elastic step beside me, I swore to myself that neither she nor Roger should ever regret what she had done to me, nor know it, if I could keep the knowledge from them. The last part of this vow was impossible of fulfillment, finally, but the first, thank God! has never been broken, or even for a moment strained, and I like to hope that this may count a little to my credit, in the ultimate auditing, for she was terribly alluring, this Margarita, and I am no more a stock or a stone than other men, I fancy.

We walked around to the shore side of the cottage and there stood Roger on its weather-beaten veranda, his hand

held out to me eagerly, an anxious, an almost wistful look in his honest blue eyes. He was unusually but not unbecomingly dressed in faded blue serge trousers, too tight for the dictates of fashion, but quite telling in their revelation of his magnificent thighs, tucked into very high wading boots and topped by a grey flannel blouse open at the neck for comfort, with a twisted dull green handkerchief by way of a collar. It was really quite picturesque altogether, and suited him excellently, as all rough-and-ready, notably masculine attire has always done. Curiously enough, he combines with this, when in evening clothes, the least resemblance to a head-waiter I have ever observed in an American; the price they pay, I suppose, for being quite the best dressed business and professional men in the world.

I took all this in, of course, in a fraction of the time it takes to write it, and also the fact that old Roger looked ten years younger than when I had last seen him. He had always been a steady, responsible fellow, you see, one of the men people put things on, and not particularly youthful for his age: a great help to him as a budding young lawyer.

But now I saw the eyes we used to see on the football field in New Haven, and even, it seemed to me for a moment, the little worried yet patient intentness I knew so well at school when some one of those tiny climaxes (that seemed so terrible then!) depended on him for a fair solution. They used to say so clearly, those honest eyes, that he hoped you agreed with him and that you felt his way was the best way, but that whether or not you agreed, he would have to do it, all the same.

He had, as I say, his hand out, and I quickly put mine into it, somehow or other not losing Margarita's at the same time. As unconsciously as a child she reached out her other hand to him and we stood like boys and girls in a ring-game, Roger and I looking deep into each other's eyes and holding Margarita tightly.

"Is it all right, Jerry?" he asked me earnestly.

"It's all right if you say so, Roger," I answered promptly. All our friendship was packed into that question and answer, and I like to think that I never asked any explanations and that he never thought of giving any till they were more or less unnecessary, the matter being settled.

"You're not alone, I hope?" he said as we moved, one each side of Margarita, into the house. I dropped her hand abruptly. Up to that moment I had completely forgotten my sensible parson.

"Not unless he's given me up and rowed back to the town," I assured him contritely, "and I hope to heaven you know who he is, for I don't! He's a thoroughly good fellow, anyhow, and he knows us, and from what I've seen of him he strikes me as just about the man we want."

"Thank you for that 'we,' Jerry," said Roger soberly, putting his arm over my shoulder, and I realised suddenly and completely that I had taken the jump and cleared my last ditch: Roger's interest in to-day's event, for good or bad, was mine.

"I'll run and call him," I began, "and mind you mention his name directly, for it's a bit awkward for me all this while." Something struck me and I turned back.

"By the way," I tried to say easily, "do you want me to—to begin any explanations?"

He laughed shortly.

"Good old Jerry!" he said affectionately. "No, I'll manage that when I find out who he is. Hurry him along, for breakfast is ready."

I dashed off to the landing and hailed the boat, now plainly visible on the bright, clear moving sea. She flew in like a swallow, the oarsman coat off and dripping, and evidently royally content.

"Has Roger got a change for me?" he called as he reached the landing. "I won't keep him ten minutes longer, but I'd like to go over the side here, tremendously."

I, too, had begun to be conscious of a wrinkled, cinder-

coated feeling, and Roger, who had followed me at a distance, turned at my shout and ran back to the cottage, returning with a white armful of linen and towels just as we had slipped into the blue, cold water. I shall never forget his expression of mingled relief, real pleasure and amusement as he recognised my companion's face, bobbing upon the surface.

"This is mighty good of you, Elder," he said simply, and reached down from the slippery stone to shake the dripping hand held out to him.

Then it came to me in a flash. Tip Elder, of course! He was supposed to have been christened Tyler, but was never known by any other name than Tippecanoe, for reasons clearer in those days than these, the old political war cry in connection with his boating fame having proved too temptingly obvious to the rest of his class crew. He was in Roger's class; I remembered how, even then, he had dragged Roger down to some boys' club of his to give a boxing lesson once to some of his protégés. He and Russell Dodge had a notable and historic quarrel once because Tip had refused to break an engagement in order to take one of Russell's many feminine incumbrances to a dance. Tip had steadily refused to accept the obligation, and had endured very patiently a vast amount of hectoring from Russell, who was then as now a trifle snobbish and unsteady; but had finally been forced (or so we regarded it, at that hot and touchy period) to accept what was practically a challenge, and we were actually on tiptoe for a duel. Feeling ran high about it, and there might have been a very disagreeable scandal had not Tip's clear common sense and persuasive oratory burst out at the last possible minute from this murky thunder-cloud and effectively swept the whole business out of the way.

But none of his prayer meetings, nor the trip to the Holy Land that he made in one long vacation ever deceived anyone who knew the fellow into thinking him a prig. He never

pretended that his ideals of practical conduct were a bit higher than those of scores of the men who had none of these interests of his. So marked was this absence of the goody-goody in Tip that I, though I recalled his face and vaguely connected him with something or other in the athletic line, never remembered these other characteristics of his until, at Roger's warm greeting, the years rolled back and Tip Elder, oarsman and philanthropist, took his proper place in my memory again.

We scrambled up the rough landing steps, rubbed down quickly and got into the fresh linen Roger had brought us, talking curt commonplaces, not even embarrassed, in the glow and vigour of that strengthening dip, and I noticed that the underwear, though of the best linen, was somehow a little unfamiliar in its fashion, indescribably antiquated in cut.

"We'll talk at breakfast," said Roger, as we hurried toward the cottage. "I know you're hungry."

He pushed open the door, and we entered, gazing curiously around us. We stood in a large, square room, evidently a dining- and living-room, washed with a greyish plaster, at once warm and cool. There was a deep, wide hearth of faded red brick on one side, and an old oak dresser covered with a very good service of gold-rimmed white china and several pieces of handsome Sheffield plate. The few chairs and settees and the one large table in the centre were all of that solid yet graceful Georgian style that our ancestors brought with them; the bare clean floor and the home-made rugs, taken with this furniture, gave an effect more usual now in a summer cottage than it was then. On the walls were eight or ten water-colour sketches framed in rustic wood; a worn wicker *chaise-longue* with patchwork cushions, struck a curiously exotic note; two spinning-wheels, a large and a small, flanked the fire and bore every evidence of use, not æstheticism; a silver bowl of unmistakable Queen Anne date, beautifully chased, filled with fiery nasturtiums, stood

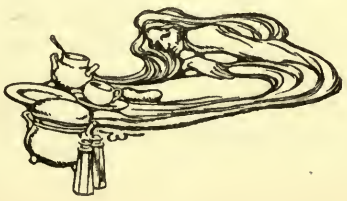
in strange neighbourliness to a cheap American alarum clock; a lovely, tarnished oval mirror reflected a hideous floral calendar, the advertisement of some seedsman. The room turned in a small ell, and this, which was evidently the kitchen corner of it, could be completely hidden from the rest by a quaint screen, very broad and high, of home manufacture, the body of which was composed of several calf-skins beautifully marked and adroitly fitted together. This last gave a touch of quaint antiquity, a hint of the bold and primitive that was deliciously satisfying. I thought it then and still think it a room in ten thousand. It had no other door nor any window opening on the beach, and this produced a softened dimness, a richness, so to speak, of lighting and gloom, a sinking into shadow of the hearth and spinning-wheels, a lightness of the dresser and the polished settle near it that struck the eye with the same contented shock one gets from a mellow Dutch interior—the same impression of previous acquaintance, of a once familiar, only half forgotten home.

I have since tried to analyse the charm of that room, its inevitable hold upon every one privileged to enter it (and I suppose few rooms in America have held a greater number of really select souls), and I have decided that its spell consisted in its deeply impersonal character; its utter lack of the characteristics, the idiosyncrasies, the imbecilities, even the fascinations of other, no matter how attractive dwelling places. It had the restful aloofness of a studio, with none of its professional limitations; the domesticity of a home, with none of its fatiguing clutter; the freedom of an inn, with none of its stale sense of over-use. And above and through all this ran the note of almost ascetic cleanliness, a purity fairly conventual. Like most men, I have a concealed passion for perfect cleanliness—concealed, because to the sex so ironically intrusted with the duty of domestic lustration cleanliness appears to mean frightful and devastating upheavals resulting in a nauseating odour of soap and furni-

ture polish. When you shall have learned, dear ladies, to *keep* your domains clean without so furiously *getting* them clean, you will have earned, in our eyes, your somewhat dubious title of housekeepers. Meanwhile, continue, in heaven's name, to think us the contentedly dirty sex!

From the kitchen ell delicious odours proceeded, and as we sat down around the shining old table with its fine, much-darned linen, and its delicate china eked out where necessary by cheap, coarse, village crockery, a heavy-faced fellow with dull eyes under a shock of hair served us with what, upon mature consideration, I believe to have been the finest breakfast I have ever eaten. A great fresh fish, broiled with bacon, plenty of those delicious corn-meal muffins (I believe they are locally and truly known as "gems") mealy potatoes fried in bacon fat, and a sort of tart jam or marmalade made of wild plums to top off with, the whole washed down with strong coffee and rich cream, melted before our keen-edged appetites like dew before the hungry sun, and we hardly spoke as we filled ourselves.

Much combined to give a flavour to the meal: the long, worried night, the short, cool plunge, the excitement of our adventure, the mystery of this empty house (for neither Margarita nor any other hostess was present) and in my own case the wild, heady consciousness of that absurd, incredible thing that had just happened to me: the confused yet certain sense that it could never be quite the same with me as it had been before I met that extraordinary girl in the faded red jersey. It was too soon to think about it, I was still stupid from the shock of it, but my blood ran very sweetly through my veins, the delicious, strong air of the beach was in my nostrils and the food was fit for the hunger of the gods.



CHAPTER XI

OUR PARSON PROVES CAPABLE

At last even we could eat no more, and Roger pulled out an old pipe that I had never seen before, pushed a jar of fragrant tobacco toward us, brought us pipes from the chimney-piece and crossed his legs definitely.

"I suppose, Tip," he said, "you're wondering why you're here, eh?"

"A little," said Tip comfortably, "but not too much. To tell you the truth, fellows, I haven't had such a thoroughly good time for—oh, for ten years, I should say! Somehow I feel as if everything but just this actual moment—this breakfast, this pipe, this queer old room—was a sort of dream and these were the only things that mattered."

"I know," Roger answered quietly, "that's the way one feels here. The place is bewitched, I think. Well, Tip, I want to get married, and I'd rather you'd be the one to do the business than any man I know."

"I rather suspected it," Tip said, "and I'll be mighty glad to do it for you, Roger. Who is she?"

There was quite a pause here, and Roger puffed slowly and thoughtfully at the old pipe and looked out of the open door toward the little bay. By and by he spoke, and the concise clearness of what he said was most characteristic of him.

"Of course I needn't go into all this at all," he began, "unless I wanted to. In fact, my original idea was to have a perfect stranger (as I somehow thought Jerry would bring) marry us without his being any the wiser. But the minute I saw you, Tip, I felt that I'd like you to know. But I'd rather you kept it to yourself."

He paused a moment, and Tip nodded gravely.

"Of course you have my word for that," he said.

"The woman I'm going to marry," Roger went on, in his quiet, practical voice, "was born and brought up on this little peninsula. She has never left it but once in her life. Her mother died when she was a baby, her father a few weeks ago, I should say. She does not know her father's name, nor, consequently, her own. It is evident from this house, the furnishings and the books, that he was a gentleman and an educated one. For as long as she can remember they were served and looked after in every way by a woman called Hester Prynne and this half-witted fellow called Caliban. Of course I have no idea what their real names were. The woman died very recently and the girl was left alone. There was a big chest fairly well filled with money under her father's bed, but not a line or word in it to give any clue. Either her father or mother must have been Italian, I should think, both from her name and her general type, but she knows no Italian whatever—only a simple childish sort of French. She is the only woman I should ever marry if I lived a hundred years, and I want you to do it to-day. Will you?"

I drew the long breath I had been holding during this speech and felt a great relief. It was all so simple, after all! I hoped Tip wouldn't spoil it, but I was afraid he would. He wasn't at all what one would call a man of the world: he had always felt a terrible responsibility for other people's actions, and this particular action was, to put it mildly, certainly rather unusual. But I had under-estimated both Tip's keenness and the effect of Roger's big, quiet personality. For Tip stared hard at his pipe a moment, then at Roger, then back at the pipe, and said:

"Surely I will, Roger. And be glad to." And there's Tip Elder for you!

We smoked awhile longer in silence. Finally Tip began again in a casual sort of way, as if, the main question having

been settled, this were a mere detail, but one that he might as well mention.

"How about the name, Roger?" he asked. "Won't that be a little awkward? At home, you know. I suppose you couldn't wait till you found it out?"

Roger threw his jaw forward a bit and pursed his mouth, a trick he had when he was bothered but couldn't see any way out of it.

"No, I couldn't," he said thoughtfully. "In the first place, to tell you the truth, I don't much believe there's any chance of finding it out except by pure accident. There's not a scrap of evidence about the place, and it is undoubtedly intentional. I've opened every book in her father's room and there are no collections of old litter in any closet—there's no attic—and not a letter or bill in the house. A doctor came here once or twice, but he never mentioned her father's name in her hearing, and this Hester told her he came from New York. Caliban did the marketing and paid cash for everything. The telegraph operator, who is the only one I've spoken with in the town, represents the attitude of everybody there, probably, and he thinks, evidently, that an eccentric recluse lives here, and that his housekeeper is pretty close-mouthed and 'unsociable,' as he put it. It's rather strange that they aren't more curious, but she must have known how to deal with them, for whatever interest anybody may have felt died out long ago. They know the man had a daughter and that she's grown now, but this fellow told me that he'd heard she went barefoot most of the time, and there was a half rumour that she was feeble-minded, and that was why they kept so close. He thinks I'm boarding here, apparently. I suppose that any curious boys or tramps that might have been tempted over here were frightened off by the dogs—there used to be a pair of them."

He paused to fill his pipe again and Tip nodded comprehendingly.

"I see," he said, "it's an extraordinary situation, isn't it?"

Another pause, and he added with his eyes carefully off Roger's face:

"This housekeeper, now—you don't think it's possible ——"

"No, I don't," Roger interrupted shortly. "Both she and the father have told Margarita that she resembled her mother, and that her mother was very good and very beautiful, but that she was not named after her. She died when the child was born, and Hester was with them then. Besides, her father used to correct her for using expressions of Hester's and forbade her to hold her knife and fork as Hester did, and things of that sort. She never ate with them, either. Margarita says that Hester loved her father but was always afraid of him."

Caliban had the table cleared now, and Tip and I stared into our reflections in the beautiful, shining mahogany where our plates had been. I suppose the same thing was in both our minds. What a strange marriage for a Bradley! What an incongruous effect, in steady old Roger's life! When one considered all the Jacksons and Searses and Cabots he might have married—there was one particular red-cheeked, big-waisted Cabot girl that old Madam Bradley had long and openly favoured—one could but gasp at the present situation. A surnameless Miranda, whose only possessions were a chest of money, a few pieces of old mahogany and a brindled hound!

"I haven't seen the young lady yet, you know, Roger," Tip reminded him gently at last, and Roger, coming out of his abstraction with a quick smile, stepped to the foot of the stairs and called, "Margarita! Margarita! *Viens, chérie!*"

She came, hesitating from stair to stair as a child does, and I caught my breath when I saw her—as I have always done whenever she appeared in a new and different dress. For she had taken off the faded jersey and put on a longer, more womanly frock of some sort of clear blue print. It was faded, too, and much washed, evidently, but its dull,

soft tone and simple, scant lines only threw out the more strongly her rich colouring and strong, supple figure. The body of it crossed on itself simply in front, like an old-time kerchief, leaving her throat bare to the little hollow at the base of it; around her waist was a belt of square silver plates heavily chased, linked together with delicate silver links. Her long braids were bound around her beautiful round head, and this fashion of hair-dressing, with its classic parting, brought out the purity of her features and the coin-like regularity of them. I saw at once that she was older than I had thought her on the beach: I had not given her twenty then.

Roger took her hand and led her into the room.

"This is Margarita," he said simply, but his face told all he did not say, and I thanked heaven that neither Elder nor I had been foolish enough to attempt what we should probably have called reasoning with him.

"Is this the man that will marry us?" she inquired gravely, taking his offered hand with a lovely, free gesture.

"Roger is going to give me the pleasure of making him so happy, yes," said Tip, very cordially, I thought, and with more grace than I had believed him capable of. But she did not even smile at him, and it was rather startling, because she had smiled at me, and I hadn't known her long enough to understand that she had absolutely none of the perfunctory motions of lips and eyes that we learn so soon and so unconsciously in this cynical old world. When Margarita didn't feel moved to smile, she didn't, that was all, just as she didn't pretend to look grave at the death of the only woman she had ever known in her life. She had never learned the game, you see.

"I should like it better if you did it," she said to me, and an idiotic joy filled every crease of my heart.

"He can't do it, dear," Roger said gently, "only Mr. Elder can," and the look of appeal he turned on Tip would have touched a harder heart than that dear fellow's.

"You see, old man," he murmured apologetically, "she says just exactly what she thinks, with no frills—she doesn't understand yet. . . ."

And good old Tip smiled back at him and said he understood, if Margarita didn't, and perhaps she would be willing to make his acquaintance a little and walk out on the beach with him?

"I want to be your friend, too, Miss Margarita, as well as Roger's," he ended.

"I will walk with you if Jerry comes too," she said placidly, and so we all laughed—I somewhat unsteadily—and Tip and I took her for a walk.

And right here I must stop and mention a very interesting thing. Though she saw him often after that, for the intimacy renewed there after so many years never has waned since, and he has woven himself strangely and wholesomely into all our lives, Margarita never cared for Tip. For a long time I did not see why, and always attributed his extraordinary invulnerability to her charm to her lack of interest in him, but suddenly one day it came to me (in my bath, I remember; I squeezed a lot of soap into my eye till I thought I should go blind) and I realised all at once what a fool I had been. She did not care for him just *because* he did not surrender to her. He was the only man but one that ever had anything to do with her, so far as I know, who was not, in one degree or another, in love with her. He admitted her beauty and charm, he admired her talent, he respected her frankness —but he never was the least little bit in love with her, and except for J—n S——t, who failed to make a great picture of her, for the same reason, I believe, he is the only man I know who ever had the opportunity, of whom that can be said.

And from the moment their eyes met, Margarita saw this (or felt it, rather, for she had not had sufficient practice in reading people at that time to be able to see it) and—he simply did not exist for her.

For I must admit it: it was her own particular fault, that. And I must hasten to add that I loved her the more for it. She *was* heartless in a situation of that sort. It would be folly to deny it. It was as much a part of her enchanting personality, and as little a defect in my indulgent eyes, as the three tiny moles under her chin (true *grains de beauté*) or her utter refusal to affect an interest in people's affairs or to eat the insides of her rolls and bread-slices. All faults, doubtless—but who would have or love a faultless woman? Not I, at any rate, for I loved her and love her and shall love her till my heart is a handful of dust, and she was far from faultless, my Margarita.

And yet, characteristically enough, it was to Tip that she turned in what was without any doubt the great decision of her life, and Tip that influenced her to it. She knew whom to go to well enough, and she knew that he was the one person qualified to give her absolutely unprejudiced counsel. Oh, yes! she knew. Just as the beasts make for the root or herb or flower that will cure them, she went to him, with an instinct as true as theirs. And I, God forgive me, was a tiny bit jealous of him for that! Men are made of curious clay, my masters, and it's a mad world indeed.

After we came back from our walk, during which she and I talked, and Tip listened quietly, he moved toward Roger and I left Margarita fondling the dog and joined him.

"She is a lovely creature, Roger," he said thoughtfully. "I don't want for a moment to meddle, but on the chance that you haven't thought of it, may I suggest one thing?"

"Fire ahead," said Roger. He had changed his clothes, and appeared in his accustomed business suit; its neat creases and quiet colour made him again the responsible, unromantic lawyer I had known, and took away the last vestige of dramatic oddity from the situation. It all seemed natural and sober enough.

"Had you thought of taking her to your mother and marrying her there, Roger?" Tip went on quietly. "Sup-

posing she were to adopt her, even—you could arrange all that easily—then there would be no awkwardness. As it is, it might be made a little uncomfortable . . . it isn't as if you were a nobody, you know, old man, and you don't know her name, you see, and . . ."

I will own that this struck me as an extremely practical plan for a moment, and I looked hopefully at Roger. But he shook his head.

"I see what you mean, Tip," said he, "but it's impossible. I wish it weren't. I thought of it, of course. But there are reasons why it won't do. I won't attempt to deny that this will be a blow to my mother. I know her too well to consider for a moment the possibility of her helping me in this way. She—she is very proud and—and she has her own ideas. . . . My cousin, too— Oh, Lord!" he concluded suddenly, "Jerry'll tell you it wouldn't work."

Of course it wouldn't. In one flash I saw that dark, determined house on the Back Bay, Madam Bradley's cold, bloodless face and Sarah's malicious eyes probing, probing Margarita's crystal unconsciousness. It seemed to me suddenly that Roger's mother might not, and that Sarah certainly would not, forgive this business. I saw his mother in a series of retrospective flashes, as I had been seeing her for twenty-five years: each time a little more impersonal, a little more withdrawn, a little less tolerant. I remembered the quiet, bitter quarrel with the president of the university to which he would naturally have gone, and its result of sending him to Yale, the first of his name to desert Harvard, to the amazement and horror of his kinsfolk. I remembered the cold resentment that followed his decision to go to work in New York, based very sensibly, I thought, on the impossibility of submission to his uncle's great firm—the head of the family—and the inadvisability of working in Boston under his disfavour. I remembered the banishment of his younger sister on her displeasing marriage (the old lady actually read her out of the family with bell and book) and the poor

woman's subsequent social death and bitter decline of health and spirit. I remembered the sad death of his second sister, and the stony philosophy of her impenetrable mother. I remembered the eldest daughter, a brilliant beauty, whose career might have brushed the skirts of actual royalty, and whose mysterious renouncement of every triumph and joy possible to woman (one would suppose) and sudden conversion and retirement to a Roman Catholic order convulsed Boston for a long nine days and broke Madam Bradley's heart so that she never smiled again—and never, it was whispered, forgave the God who had allowed such a shipwreck. That she loved Roger, I must believe; that she was proud of him and looked upon him with a sort of stern, fanatical loyalty as the head of her family, I knew. But I could not see her adopting, or even tolerating, Margarita with the unknown name. No, it wouldn't do. And I told Tip so very decidedly.

"But if you wanted to take her to my mother, Roger," I ventured, seeing, in fancy, the dear woman cooing over Roger's mysterious, romantic beauty (she adored him and would, moreover, have adopted a chambermaid if I had begged her to), "it could be arranged, I know. . . ."

"Thank you, Jerry," he interrupted shortly, "but it must be now. I can't have anything happen. Any slip——" I saw his hands clench, and I knew why. Whether Tip knew, I couldn't tell; he never indicated it, then or ever after, good fellow. But he wasn't a fool. "*Mêlez-vous de c'qui vous regarde!*" as we used to say at Vevay, and Tip minded his business well.

"That's all right," he said quickly, "I only thought I'd mention it. How about the license in this state?"

They talked a little in low tones, and I looked at Margarita and thought of the odd chances of life, and how we are hurried past this and that and stranded on the other, and skim the rapids sometimes, to be wrecked later in clear shallows, perhaps.

"If you are ready, then?" said Tip, and we all moved across the beach and found ourselves standing on a great, smooth rock that would be cut off in a full high tide, with Caliban, clean and quiet and pathetically attentive, behind us, and with him a curiously familiar stranger, very neatly dressed, with tired eyes. As we grouped ourselves there and Tip pulled a tiny book from his pocket I recollected this stranger's face—it was the telegraph operator! Roger, who forgot nothing, had brought him over for the other witness.

"Dearly beloved," said Tip in a clear, deep voice, and I woke with a start and realised that old Roger was being married. Margarita, in her graceful, faded blue gown, gazed curiously at him, one hand in Roger's; the noon sun streamed down on us from a cloudless, turquoise sky; the little waves ran up the points of rocks, broke, and fell away musically.

To appreciate those quaint sentences of the marriage service, you must hear them out under the heavens, alone, with no bridesmaids, no voice that breathed o'er Eden, no flowers but the great handful of flaming nasturtiums Roger had put in her hands (no maiden lilies grew on that rock!) and a quiet man dressed just as other men are dressed, with only the consciousness of his calling to separate him from the rest of us. They held their own, those quaint old phrases, I assure you! But it was then I learned to respect them.

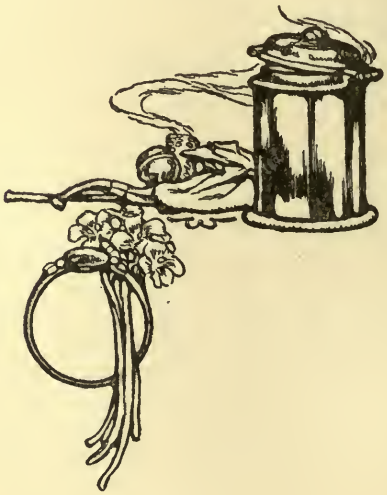
Nevertheless, Roger *had* forgotten something.

"Where's the ring?" the telegraph operator motioned to me with his lips. His tired eyes expressed a mild interest. I saw Roger's lips purse; for a moment his eyes left Margarita's face and I knew that he had just remembered it. I looked down vaguely, and my eyes fell upon the worn, thin band on my little finger—my mother's mother's wedding-ring. In one of those lightning flashes of memory I saw myself, a lad again, starting for college, and my mother putting it on my finger.

"She was the best woman, I believe, that ever lived, Jerry —I took it when she died. I want you to wear it, and perhaps you will think—oh, my darling! I know it is hard to be a good man, but will you try?"

My dear, dear mother! I think I tried—I hope so.

I slipped it from my finger—I had taken it off sometimes, but never for so good a reason—and pressed it into Roger's hand. He accepted it as unconsciously as if it had come from heaven—and it was my ring that married Margarita.



I SEEM TO SEE . . . A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN A BLUE DRESS SITTING UNDER A FRUIT TREE

CHAPTER XII

I LEAVE EDEN

CLEAR as I am on a thousand little points that concern my first meeting with Margarita, my mind is a perfect blank when I try to recall the events of the next half hour. We must, of course, have left the rock, for I have a dim recollection of drinking healths in that dear old room and signing our names to something. But on what order we left it, of what we spoke, if we spoke at all, and how we at last found ourselves alone, I do not know. And yet it seems to me that some one—was it I?—discussed remedies for insomnia with some one else, and that some third person assured us that nothing but a complete change of scene could be of any lasting benefit. And my reason assures me that Tip and I and the telegraph operator must have been these three, for I seem to see, as if through a dim haze, a beautiful woman in a blue dress sitting under a fruit tree, with a dog's head in her lap, a flaming handful of nasturtiums in her belt, and a man lying at her feet, with his hand in hers and his eyes fixed on her face. This could hardly have been Roger, one would think, for Roger was not a demonstrative man, and certainly not likely to have been so under these circumstances . . . and yet, if not Roger, who could it have been?

After that I remember well enough. Caliban was to row the telegrapher back, as he had brought him over, and as the haggard little fellow advanced to say his good-byes, Margarita and Roger appeared from somewhere to receive them. He shook her hand cordially and tried honestly not to stare too admiringly at her.

"This has been a great pleasure, Mrs. Bradley, a real pleasure to me," he said, "aside from the romance and—and so forth, you understand. It isn't often I can get off like this in the daytime, and I shouldn't wonder if the air and the water and all made me sleep a little to-night! I little thought when Mr. Bradley asked for an hour of my time to-day that I should be going to the wedding of the Miss Prynne I had heard so much about."

Tip and I glanced irrepressibly at each other, wondering if this suggestion would commend itself to Roger. But he, I think, had paid no attention to the words, and his smile was merely kindly and polite. So the sleepless one rowed away, the richer by a box of good cigars, and Tip and I were left to plan our own departure.

For mine, at any rate, Roger seemed in no hurry. When Tip assured him that he must, without fail, catch the next possible train, he got a schedule and arranged for a short drive across country to a tiny station that profited by the summer residence of a railroad magnate, and could connect him with an otherwise impossible express; but me he urged to stop on in terms so unmistakably sincere that I saw he really wanted a few more hours of my company, at least; and as I found that a milk-train stopped at the village at ten that night, and had learned from experience that much might be accomplished with a banknote and a cigar and an obliging brakeman, I was glad enough to stay on, and with a curious feeling of return to the actual world I pushed out across the beach with Roger and Margarita, who dropped on the sand with the great dog at their feet. I joined them quietly and we sat, hardly speaking, for at least three long, golden hours. They drew me, a naturally rather talkative person, into one of their deep peaceful silences, and just because there was so much to say, we wisely left it unsaid, and rested like the animals (or the angels, maybe?) in a rich content.

It was then that I understood the vital principle of the

Friends' Meeting House, and realised how much of the heat and vulgarity of life the best Quaker tradition buries under the cool, deep waves of its invaluable Silence. To such artists in life the lack of speech is not repression—far from it. Myself, I have never lived more generously than in that wonderful afternoon, and the few hours that came afterward were mere by-play.

Later Caliban brought us a picnic supper on the beach and then Roger wrote some letters, gave me many instructions for his partner, listed the matters to be put off for a week and those to be sent to him for personal attention (precious few, these!) and agreed to my suggestion that when he returned to town my mother should meet them and take Margarita in charge for the purchases that must be made before the year of travel he intended to take with his wife—lucky fellow, whose lap Fate had filled with all her gifts!

He was to let me know when he would come and I was to forward his mother's answer to the letter he had written her; most of their intercourse of late had been of this sort, for his uncle's recent death had opened again the vexed question of Boston residence and his inability to comply with her unreasonable demands had strained anew relations never very close, humanly considered. The unfortunate early years of family restraint, the lack of all those weak and tender intimacies, not uncommon in New England families, had borne their legitimate fruit, and my mother's gentle passionate heart froze at the mere thought of Madam Bradley's icy reserve, while to me, I own, she was never more than an unpleasant abstraction.

And then the time came and Caliban pulled the boat across and I pressed Margarita's hand and stood up to go. Roger took both my hands and wrung them.

"I couldn't speak about the ring, Jerry," he said, quickly and very low, "it's no use trying. But you understand?"

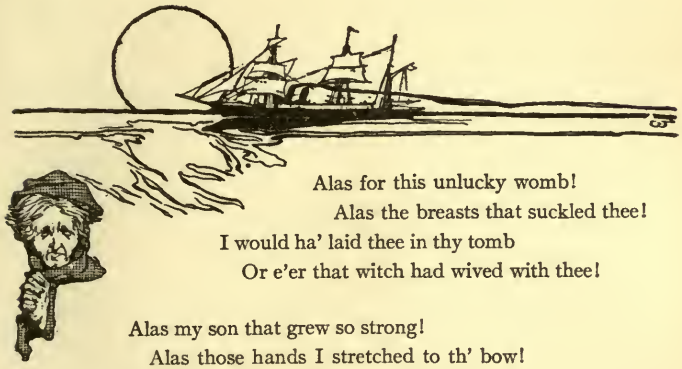
"That's all right, Roger," I muttered hastily, "it's the

best use I'm likely to make of it. Good-bye, old fellow. God bless you, Roger," and I stumbled into the boat.

Caliban pulled hard at the oars and we slid away. I looked at them once. For a full minute—dear fellow—he stared wistfully after me (oh, Roger, you'll never forget, never, I know! Twenty-five years are over and gone to-night, and the close, unrivalled companionship of them, and I am alone from now on—but you'll not forget!) and then they turned to each other and I was no more than a speck on the evening water. "Put your back into it, man; get along, can't you?" I growled to Caliban. We shot ahead and left them to each other, alone under the heavy, yellow moon and the close, secret stars.

PART FOUR

IN WHICH THE STREAM WINDS THROUGH A SULLEN MARSH AND BECOMES A BROOK



Alas for this unlucky womb!
Alas the breasts that suckled thee!
I would ha' laid thee in thy tomb
Or e'er that witch had wived with thee!

Alas my son that grew so strong!
Alas those hands I stretched to th' bow!
Or e'er thou heardst that wanton's song,
I'd shot thee long ago and long,
Through the black heart that's shamed me so!

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER XIII

STRAWS THAT SHOWED THE WIND

[To Roger from his Cousin Sarah]

Boston, Sept. 7th, 188—

My Dear Roger:

Your mother, I am sorry to say, is not physically able to answer your surprising and most disturbing letter, and has laid upon me the unpleasant task of doing so. It is, as you somewhat brusquely say, unnecessary to discuss at any length what you have done, since it is irrevocable. We can but feel, however, that a thing so hastily entered upon can be productive of no good (if, indeed, the matter has been as sudden as you lead us to suppose).

To a woman of your mother's deep family pride this alliance with a nameless girl from the streets, practically, if I am to read your letter aright, can be nothing short of humiliating. She instructs me to tell you that she can take no cognisance of any such connection with any justice to the family interests, and that although you will always be welcome here, she cannot undertake to extend the welcome further with any sincerity of heart.

I sent, following your suggestions, for Winfred Jerrolds, but I cannot say that his evidently unwilling admissions made the affair any the more palatable—how could they? Some of the inferences I was forced to draw I cannot bring myself to discuss, even with your mother. Winfred's French bringing up and the influence of a weakly affectionate mother have singularly warped his moral perception. It is impossible for us not to feel that had you followed Aunt Miriam's advice and established yourself in Boston, these dreadful results would have been avoided. I try to believe

that with the altered standards of the city you have chosen your very fibre has so weakened that you cannot grasp the extent of the mistake you have made.

Winfred Jerrolds may, as you say, have been your best friend, in one sense, but I fear that sense is a very narrow one. He has certainly succeeded beyond anything he could have hoped in his connection with our family. I always thought his attentions to Uncle Winthrop unnatural in so young a boy, but he was always politic. I am informed by Uncle Searsy's partner that nothing can be done about it; you will be pleased, probably.

You will realise, I hope, that living as I do with Aunt Miriam, I cannot with propriety take any course counter to hers in the matter of your marriage. It may be that she will be more reconciled with time—I hope so, for it must be a terrible thought for you that she might die with such feelings as she now has for her only son!

Your affectionate cousin,

SARAH THAYER BRADLEY.

[FROM MY MOTHER]

STRATFORD, CONN.,
Sept. 7th, 188—

MY DARLING BOY:

This is a hasty note to tell you that I am afraid I cannot come to you and help dear Roger's bride (how interesting and beautiful she must be!) for I must stay and nurse poor old Jeanne, who has had a bad fall putting up the new curtains and nearly fractured her hip. She is in a great deal of pain and cannot bear anyone but me about her. I should enjoy helping Roger's wife with her trousseau—how did he happen to go to the island she lives on? Is she one of the Devonshire Prynnes? Your father knew a Colonel Prynne—cavalry, I think. How you will miss Roger—for it will be different, now, Winfred—it must be, you know. Oh, my dear boy, if only I could help *your* wife! If only I could see you with children of your own! Don't wait too long. Your father and I had but four years together, but I would live my

whole life over again with no change, for those four. I must go to Jeanne, now.

Your loving MOTHER.

[FROM ROGER'S SISTER]

NEWTON, MASS.,
Sept. 10th, 188—

DEAR JERRY:

I hope you and Roger will not think me unkind, but Walter will not hear of my looking up Roger's wife, as you ask me. You see Mother has just begun to to be nice to him, and we can't afford to lose her good-will, Winfred—we simply can't. I think Roger has a perfect right to marry whom he chooses and I don't believe a word of the horrid things Sarah says. They are not true, are they? But of course they're not. But why did Roger do it so suddenly? Why not let us meet her first? What will people think? She will hate me, I suppose, but Roger knows what we have suffered from Mother and I hope he will understand. Walter's eyes have been very bad, lately, and Mother is going to get Cousin Wolcott Sears to send him on some confidential business to Germany, the voyage will do him so much good! Do explain to Roger—he will understand. And ask him to write to me, if he will.

Yours always,
ALICE BRADLEY-CARTER.

[FROM ROGER'S UNCLE]

3—— COMMONWEALTH AVE.,
BOSTON, MASS., Sept. 12th, 188—

MY DEAR ROGER:

Your mother has communicated to me the facts of your marriage, and while I cannot pretend that I feel the haste and apparent mystery surrounding it are entirely satisfactory to your aunt and myself, I have hastened to point out to your mother that a man of your age and known character is beyond question competent to use his judgment in such

a matter and that I cannot believe you so unworthy of the family traditions as she feels you to have shown yourself. In any case, I disapprove heartily of any public break or scandal, and in the event of her failing to reverse her decision, which I believe to be too severe and unjustifiable in view of your consistently clean record in all your family relations, I am writing to offer you, in your aunt's name as well as my own, the hospitality of our house as long as you and Mrs. Bradley care to avail yourselves of it.

With every hope that this distressing situation may be quietly and privately adjusted, and regards to Mrs. Bradley from your aunt and myself, believe me,

Yours faithfully,

WOLCOTT SEARS.

[FROM TIP ELDER]

UNIVERSITY CLUB,
NEW YORK, Sept. 13th, 188—

DEAR JERRY:

I can't resist sending you a line to tell you of my encounter with Russell Dodge, just now. You might drop Roger a hint of it if you like, not going into details, of course. I hope it will be for the best. I was so hot at the fellow's impertinence I let myself get caught into a lie, I'm afraid, but like Tom Sawyer's aunt, I can't help feeling "it was a good lie!"

He was dining here with a set of pretty well-known New York men and I had my back to his table. Suddenly I heard Roger's name and a great deal of laughing and in a moment I found myself overhearing (unavoidably) a disgusting and scandalous piece of gossip. In some strange way a garbled account of his marriage has come in from Boston, and Dodge, with that infernally suggestive way of his, was cackling about Roger's "jumping over the broomstick" with a "handsome gypsy" and letting his relatives believe the thing was serious in order to tease his stiff-necked family.

I tell you, it made me hot! I jumped up and looked that

fellow Dodge as straight in the eye as anyone can look him, and said, "I beg your pardon for this interruption, Dodge, but you happen to be making more of a fool of yourself than usual. As regards the lady you are speaking of, I married her myself at her father's country place, last week, with Winfred Jerrolds as best man."

He mumbled something or other, but I forced him to apologise plainly, and they all heard him. Then he said that he had understood that no one in Boston even knew what her name was, and I said almost (I hope!) before I thought, "she was a Miss Prynne."

Then I left for the writing-room. My only excuse is that Roger himself did not correct that fellow from the station when he called her that, and, honestly, I couldn't turn on my heel and leave that last remark open. I'm ready to eat dirt, if need be, but for a fire-eating parson I still think I did pretty well! To think of my running against Dodge again after all these years—you remember our famous duel?

What a strange day we had out there! Let me know how Roger feels about it. It's sure to be in the papers now, I suppose. The name, I mean—I've quashed the other part, of course.

Yours faithfully,

TYLER FESSENDEN ELDER.

[FROM SUE PAYNTER]

3— WASHINGTON SQUARE,
Sept. 14th, 188—

JERRY DEAR:

It occurred to me in the middle of the night that you might be excused for thinking me cold and uninterested in your request apropos of Roger's wife, and I can't bear you to think so for a moment. Shall I be quite frank (and how foolish to be anything else with you, dear Win!) and admit that I was just a little hurt that Roger had not told me? It was stupid of me, I know, and I hereby forgive him—before he asks me, *par exemple!* I do it thus quickly, I am afraid, because of an unusually nasty letter from Sarah.

How can a woman be so good and yet so horrid? If Roger has been unwise, all the more reason for us to stand by him!

But apparently he has not, and you are under the same spell that bewitched him—don't attempt to deny it. Madam Bradley threatens us all with excommunication, it seems, but *n'importe*—she has been kind to me, in her alabaster way, but it is incredible that I should desert Roger after his unspeakable goodness to me.

I will meet you whenever and wherever you say and give the new Mrs. Roger the benefit of whatever good taste Providence has blessed me with—I am a past mistress of the art of a hasty trousseau, I assure you! And I pray she may wear hers more happily than I did mine.

Be sure to let me know the moment I am wanted. Let Roger know how glad I am—if he asks. What friends you two are! I wonder if you know what you are losing? Probably not—men don't foresee, I suppose.

Your friend always,

SUE PAYNTER.

[FROM MY ATTORNEYS]

SEARS, BRADLEY AND SEARS
Attorneys and Counsellors-at-Law

Cable Address, Vellashta

2— COURT STREET, BOSTON, MASS.
Sept. 12th, 188—

WINFRED JERROLDS, ESQ.,
University Club,
New York, N. Y.

DEAR SIR:

We are instructed by the heirs and next-of-kin of the late Mr. Winthrop Bradley and by Mr. Sears Bradley, as his administrator appointed by the Probate Court, to advise you that the will of Mr. Winthrop Bradley, of the existence of which we have so long felt confident, has finally been discovered in an unexpected way and that you are the principal legatee thereunder.

We are further instructed to advise you that its genuineness is unquestioned. We are already taking steps to probate the will here and in North Carolina.

You will see by the will, of which we enclose you copy, that Mr. Winthrop Bradley bequeathed to you $100,000 —in bonds of the —— Co., which bear 4½ per cent. interest, and in addition his lands in ——— and ——— Counties, North Carolina, which aggregate about 12,000 acres, and of which a part has been farmed on shares for a number of years past, bringing in an annual income varying between $75 and $250 above the taxes on the whole tract.

We shall be pleased to receive any instructions you desire to give us in the premises. We remain,

Yours very respectfully,

SEARS, BRADLEY AND SEARS.

[ROGER'S TELEGRAM TO ME]

News of will forwarded in packet from office. More glad than can say, deserve it all. Cold wave here and shall take noon express Thursday. Sail Saturday. R. B.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ISLAND COTTAGE

I HAVE hitherto said nothing about the Bank, for the best of reasons—I hate it. I hated it, I think, from the day when a letter from one of my father's friends introduced me to it, until the day when the letter from the legal firm of which Roger's uncle had been the brilliant head released me from it. I do not think, however, that many people knew this. I did my work as well as I could, accepted my periodical advances in salary with a becoming gratitude, saved a little each year, and quieted my eruptions of furious disgust with the recollection of my mother's unhindered disposal of her little legacy since the day I left the university.

If anyone had told me that on a day in early autumn I should suddenly come into a thousand pounds a year and freedom, I should have caught my breath at the very idea, and here was the thing, a fact accomplished, and here was I, not only quite self-contained, but sober beyond my wont, and ready to take the Bank and all its stodgy horror upon my shoulders, if with it I might have had one thing—one woman! The world was before me, where to choose, all the far corners and reaches for which I had inherited the hunger with the blood that ran in my veins—and if I might only have been the first to find one lonely, insignificant point on the Atlantic coast, my heart would have journeyed there, content, and ceased (or so I thought) its wanderings. Truly our joys are tempered for us, and no shorn lamb was ever more carefully protected from the winds of heaven than we from too much joy. It is an actual fact that I regarded my resignation from the drudgery of twelve years, the disposal of my

rooms and furniture, the heartening preliminaries with the lawyers, and my booking at the steamship company's offices, with less interest than the successful transportation of Margarita's wedding gift.

It was with a real thrill of pleasure that I drew out my small savings—a little over a thousand pounds—and with the breathless assistance of Sue Paynter and a famous actress of her acquaintance selected the most perfect single pearl to be purchased for that money. One of the heads of the great firm whose name has been long associated with American wealth and luxury himself lent a discerning hand to the selection, and for the first time I tasted the snobbish joy of sitting at ease in a dainty private room while respectful officials brought the splendours of the Orient to my lordly knees, and lesser buyers hung unattended over the common counters. Except in the purchase of my first gift for my mother—a tiny diamond sword-hilt, in memory of my father—I have never experienced so much pleasure.

It hung, a great blob of veined, milky whiteness, from a strong but tiny golden chain—a gift for a Rajah, not a bank-official! I had never expended so much, or half so much, upon a single purchase, and the pale, native thrift of Old and New England together glowed and thrilled scarlet in me, and the lucent, moonlike sphere flushed into a ruby before my dazzled eyes: I knew then how an eager chief will toss away a province for an emerald—if he may lay the jewel upon the neck of all the world for him!

I had the clasp engraved with her name—itself a pearl—and slipped the delicate case in my pocket. The great comedienne, whom I have always thought the sweetest of women—but one—talked a moment aside at the smiling request of the master jeweller and then whispered laughingly to Sue with the most artfully artless glance at me. Sue, who was a little drawn and white from her enemy neuralgia, murmured to me in French that I had the honour to render desolate Miss L——n R——l, the reigning stage beauty, who was greatly

desirous of precisely that pearl and whose too vacillating admirer would doubtless enjoy his bad little quarter hour *à cause de moi*. I do not deny that this put a point to my satisfaction. I was, in fact, idiotically gratified—God and man that is born of woman alone know why.

I hurried to the dingy station as a boy hurries to the train that will take him home to the holidays, and the tedious hours were miraculously light, the face of the telegraph operator like the face of my best friend, the rough, damp passage in the blue boat a pleasant incident. Caliban had a friendly, stupid grin for me and rowed his best; the very oars knew how I wanted to get to her!

They stood with a lantern on the landing-steps, in the rough, picturesque clothes I had first seen them in, and we hurried through a thickening drizzle to the warm, light cottage, ridiculously hand-in-hand, the lantern bobbing between us.

Roger had revived his old school accomplishments and had ready a panful of delicious little sausages in a bath of tomatoes and onions and Worcestershire that sent me back to Vevay in the fraction of a second, and we dipped fragments of the crusty French loaf I had brought in the sauce, in the old Vevay fashion, and drank to their voyage in the last Burgundy from the little wine bin. If anything were needed to place Margarita's father in our estimations, that Burgundy would have done it! After the sweet course of jellied pancakes that Roger had taught Caliban, we fell upon the cigars I had brought, and when Margarita, an apt pupil, had sugared my demi-tasse to my liking, I reached into my pocket and drew out the Russia leather case. My fingers trembled like a boy's as I took out the pearl and clasped it around her beautiful neck, above the soft black handkerchief.

"If this is not your first wedding present, Mrs. Bradley, I shall be furiously angry," I said with mock severity, to keep down the lump in my throat, for I was absurdly excited.

"Jerry, you extravagant old donkey, what do you mean by this?" Roger cried huskily, "I never heard of such a thing!" While Margarita, for the first time in our acquaintance a daughter of Eve, ran up to her mirror. She would have been as pleased, I think, with a necklace of iridescent seashells—wherein she differed widely from Miss L——n R——l, as Roger and I agreed.

We talked, of course, of Uncle Winthrop and the old days, of his loving interest in me, the slender little chap with the dead soldier-father, who had taken long walks up and down narrow old Winter Street with him, and mailed his letters, and fenced with his sword, and listened by the hour to his tales of rainy bivouac and last redoubt, of precious drops of brandy to a dying comrade and brave loans of army blankets in the cold dawn. We wondered at the extraordinary chance which had kept the old portfolio, with its worn leather edges that I remembered so well, hidden during the two years that had elapsed since his death, and what secretive instinct had led him to put his last will and testament there. We marvelled at the sagacity which had led him to drop hints as to the existence of such a document so effectively that the family had felt themselves bound to hold the property intact for three years, to give every possible chance of finding it, and had spent many useless dollars in the search for the old servants who were believed (and rightly, as the event proved) to have witnessed it. Our friendship had been more than ordinary in its strength and real sympathy; one of those attractions that laugh at disparity of years and absence of any tie of kinship, and, indeed, up to his death I had been far closer to him than Roger ever was. Dear old Uncle Win! He knew what he would do for me and what it would mean to me, well enough: as a young fellow, he had been tied to *his* Bank!

I spoke tentatively of Sue Paynter, and Roger flushed and struck the table in his disgusted excitement.

"Good heavens, Jerry—I never once thought——"

Poor Sue! There was nothing more to say.

"The first thing I want you to do for me, Jerry," said Roger, "is to go through the cottage thoroughly and see if you discover any trace of who lived here. I've done it, of course, but I'd like to have some one else do it, too. Go all by yourself, and I won't give you any hint of my idea, and then we'll compare notes."

Nothing, just then, could have interested me more, and I started systematically for the cellar steps, lantern in hand.

The first thing that struck me was the trim neatness of this part of the house, too often—and especially in country districts—neglected. The steps were firm and clean and nearly dustless, the cement floor dry and apparently freshly swept, the walls and ceiling well whitened with lime. Bins of vegetables, a barrel of summer apples, a cask of vinegar on two trestles with a pail thriftily set for the drippings, a wire cupboard with plates of food set there for the cellar coolness, and in one corner a little dairy compartment, built over a spring covered by a wooden trap-door, completed the furnishings of the floor. For the rest, the place was a fairly well-stocked tool-house; a scythe and a grindstone, snow-shovel and ladders were arranged compactly; a watering-pot and rake stood fresh from use by the door.

A low cow-stall came next and beyond this a fowl roost, both these last noticeably clean and sweet, and this in a day when the microbe and the germ were not such prominent factors in our civilisation as they are at present.

I retraced my steps and went through the living-room to the room beyond it, over the shed and dairy. It was a fair-sized study, unmistakably a man's. The end wall held the fireplace, with a large map of the world hung over it. The ocean side of the cottage was windowless and lined with well-used books on pine shelves. These overflowed on the wall which held the entrance door, and where they stopped a sort of trophy of arms was arranged on the wall. An army revolver, a great

Western six-shooter, a fine little hunting-piece, a grim Ghoorka knife and an assegai, which I recognised from similar treasures on the barrack wall of an English friend of mine—an infantry major—one or two bayonets, a curious Japanese sword and a curved dagger whose workmanship was quite unknown to me, completed this decoration, which was the only one on the walls. In the centre of the floor stood a large table-desk of well-polished cherry with a heavy glass ink-well, pin-tray, letter-rack, etc., and a fair, clean square of blotting-paper. But none of the customary litter of such a desk was upon it; all was swept and garnished, orderly and bare. The drawers were empty, the ink-well pure, the very pens new. There was not the faintest hint of what work had gone on at that desk.

I crossed the room and took down a book here and there at random from the shelves. From one or two, evidently old ones, the fly leaves had been neatly cut out; others had no mark of any kind. It came over me with a staggering certainty that here was no careless, makeshift impulse; a methodical, definite annihilation had been intended and accomplished. An extraordinary man had arranged this. What was the secret he had concealed so perfectly, and what had been his motive? What his necessity? Three or four comfortable chairs and a light wicker table completed the furniture of the room, which held—for me—the strange fascination of the living-room, that deep, impersonal sense of culture, that rigorous suppression of whim and irrelevant detail. The man (not so long dead, probably) who stood behind that room had stamped it indelibly, inevitably with the very character he had tried to eliminate from it. One wanted to have known him: one felt instinctively what a firm grip, what a level eye he had.

The books were almost as little tell-tale as the rest. A fine set of the Encyclopædia Britannica; histories of all sorts, but only the best in every case; a little standard poetry; the great English novelists—Dickens much worn, Meredith's

early works, the unquenchable Charles Reade, who has nursed so many fretful convalescents back to the harness; two or three fine editions of Shakespeare, one, a half-dozen small green volumes, worn loose from their bindings; Darwin, Huxley, and a dozen blazers of that wonderful trail, much underlined and cross-indexed, and a really remarkable collection of the great scientific travellers and explorers, that occupied much space; and a fair collection of French fiction and archæological research and German scientific and historical work completed my first rough impression of this library. I have gone over it very carefully since, and amused myself with noting its omissions—quite as significant in such cases as the actual contents. No classics but the usual school and college text-books; no recent fiction; almost no American literature except the most reliable of the historians; none of the essayists or belle-lettrists, except Carlyle, Macaulay, and such like heavy artillery; nothing whatever of a religious nature but a small, worn Bible thick with dust, on the top shelf among the school-books. And there was not in the whole library one page or line or word to indicate that its owner was conversant with or interested in Italian or Italy.

O builder of that sand-hued cottage, owner of that manly room of books, how many hours have I devoted to patient study of you! How many nights have I hunted you down, searched you out, compelled you to reveal yourself to me—and how strangely have I succeeded! It has been a labour of love, and I have sometimes felt I know your mind almost as my own.

In the outside further corner of the room a narrow, steep flight of steps led to the second story and lent a queer little foreign air to the whole. Ascending, I found myself in a small room with one door—its only entrance—and one window. For a moment I had a curious sense of the English barracks and seemed to be in the major's sleeping-room again. A low cot-bed with a narrow rug beside, a pine

washing-stand and a chest of drawers, a straight chair and small bed-table with a reflecting candle and match box upon it, and a flat tin bath furnished this room, which was, like all the others, speckless. A small shaving-mirror was attached at convenient height near the window; razor and strop hung beside it. All this I took in at a glance, without turning, but when I did turn and confronted the entrance wall, I caught my breath. For there on the space directly opposite the bed hung what, for a moment, I took to be a portrait of Margarita.

I moved closer and saw that it was a wonderfully perfect etching of a head by Henner—a first impression, beyond a doubt. It was a girl's head, half life size, almost in profile, white against the dark rain of her hair, which covered her shoulders and bust and blackened all the rest of the picture. The haunting melancholy, the youth, the purity of that face have become so associated with Margarita and her home and that part of my life that I can never separate them, though it has been more than once pointed out to me, and fairly, I dare say, that the picture does not resemble her so much as I think, that her type of beauty is larger, less conventional, infinitely richer, and that, aside from the really unusually suggestive accident of her likeness, it is only a general effect.

Well, well, it may be. But I dare to believe that I understand, perhaps better than anybody, why it hung facing that bare cot-bed, and what it meant to the man who slept so many years of his life there, dreaming of the woman for whose sake he hung it. He knew what it recalled to him even as I know what it means to me, and to both of us it was more than any portrait. For we are fearfully and wonderfully made so that no reality shall ever content us, and those sudden sunsets and bars of music and the meaning glance of pictured eyes are to teach us this. . . .

The picture (etched by Waltner) was framed in a broad band of dull gold, and under it, on a very slender, delicately

carved teak-wood stand whose inlaid top just held it, was a silver bowl full of orange and yellow and flaming nasturtiums. They were quite fresh and must have been put there that morning, for the dew was still on the pale leaves.

It was inexpressibly touching, this altar-like, vivid touch in the austere room, and I stood, drowned in a wave of pity and passionate regret—for what I could not quite tell—before it, overwhelmed by the close, compelling pressure of these mysterious dead loves: all over now and gone? Ah, who knows? Who can know? Not Darwin nor Huxley, be sure!

I went down the stairs, crossed the study and living-room, and after a comprehensive glance over the little kitchen ell with its simple *batterie de cuisine* went up the main staircase, and entered the room over the study. Here again was a surprise, for this room was completely furnished in delicate, light bird's-eye maple, fit for a marquise, all dainty lemon-tinted curves. The exquisite bed was framed for a canopy, but lacked it; the coral satin recesses of the dressing-table had faded almost colourless; the chintz of the slender chairs had lost its pattern. An oval cheval glass reflected the floor on whose long unpolished surface sprawled two magnificent white bear skins. But with these furnishings the elegance ended, for nowhere in the cottage were to be found such curious, mocking contrasts. The walls, which should have displayed wanton Watteau cherubs, were bare, clean grey; instead of a satin coverlet a patchwork quilt covered the fluted bed; no scented glass and ivory and silver-stoppered armoury of beauty crowded the dressing-table, only a plain brush and comb such as one might see in some servant's quarters; the beautiful grained wardrobe's doors, carelessly ajar, spilled no foam and froth of lace and ribbon and silk stocking: only a beggarly handful of clean, well-worn print gowns hung from the shining pegs. A battered tin bath and water-can stood beneath the window, and on a

graceful cushioned *prie-dieu* instead of a missal lay—of all things—a mouse trap.

I have never in my life stood in a room so contradictory, so utterly unrelated to its supposed intention. Occupied it certainly was: towels and soap and sponge, and night-gown neatly folded on the patchwork quilt, showed that. But of all teasing suggestion of femininity, all the whimsical, rosy privacy of a girl's bedchamber, all the dainty nonsense and pretty purity, half artless, half artful, with which romance has invested this retreat and poetry and song have serenaded it, Margarita's apartment was entirely void. Even its spotlessness was not remarkable in a house so noticeable everywhere for this quality, and as for personality, a nun's cell has more. I think that its utter scentlessness added to the peculiar impression; there was not a suggestion of this feminine allurement; not even the homely lavender or the reminiscent dried roses hinted at the most matter-of-fact housewife's concession to her sex.

And yet it had its own charm, this strange room, a peculiar French quality, provided, perhaps, by the mingling of yellow furniture and soft grey wall spaces; and a quaint atmosphere of something once alive and breathing and daintily fleshly, cooled and faded and chastened by inexorable time. . . .

I slept that night in the room with the etching (the silver bowl was filled with marigolds) and all night I heard the roar of the surf and the hiss of the breaking waves through my busy dreams.

I woke into a clear storm-swept morning, just after the dawn, very suddenly, and with no apparent reason for the waking. That is to say, I thought I woke, but knew instantly that it must be a very pleasant and odd species of dream, for there in the quiet light, at the foot of my bed—quite on it, in fact—sat Margarita. She smiled placidly, classic in her long white nightgown, and I smiled placidly back as one does in dreams, and prayed not to wake.

"You speak when you sleep do you not, Jerry?" she said calmly, "because you called my name, but your eyes were closed."

Then a cold sweat broke out on my forehead and I clenched my hands under the blankets, for I knew I was awake.

"Margarita!" I gasped, "what is it? Why are you here?"

"Because I wanted to talk to you, Jerry," she answered pleasantly. "Roger is asleep. Do you like this little room? It is my father's."

Her hair hung in two braids; one rosy bare foot showed under her nightgown, as she sat, her hands clasped about her knees, like a boy. The upper button of the gown was loose and I saw my milky, gleaming pearl around her neck; it was no whiter than her even teeth.

"Get down," I said sternly, "get off the bed immediately and go back to your room. You ought not to have come here!"

"But I do not want to get down, Jerry—the floor is cold. Roger is asleep and he cannot talk to me. It is like being alone, when anyone is asleep. Do you not want to talk to me, Jerry?"

"Yes, I want to talk to you, well enough," I answered in a sort of stupor, "but—but you must go. Please go, Margarita!"

In her abominable perspicacity she answered what I meant, not what I said.

"No," said she, shaking her head adorably, "I shall not go. Why do you pull the blanket up to your chin so? Are you cold, too?"

My head was whirling and my breath came uneven through my lips, but I fixed my eyes on the wall over her head, and this time there was, for the best of reasons, no ambiguity in my voice.

"I beg and implore you, Margarita, to get down at once," I said, as steadily as I could. "It is not at all proper for you to be here, and I do not wish it. If you want to talk to me, I

will dress immediately and go out for a walk with you, but not unless you go instantly. Do you understand me?"

She sighed plaintively and unclasped her hands from her knees.

"Yes, I understand you, Jerry," she said, dropping her voice that haunting third, "but I would rather——"

"Are you going?" I cried.

"Y-yes, I am going," she murmured, and with what I knew were backward imploring glances and argumentative pouts she slipped down, hesitatingly, hopefully, as a child retreats, and pattered across to the door.

When I lowered my eyes the room was empty—but where she had sat the blanket was yet warm!

CHAPTER XV

FATE PLAYS ME IN THE SHALLOWS

To-day I dived into one of my boxes for some warmer underclothing and stumbled upon a pair of rubber-soled shoes for deck wear. They brought the great boat before me in a flash and then the wharves and then the little group that had gathered at the long pier on that Saturday morning so long ago—Wolcott Sears and his wife, Sue, white as a ghost, Tip Elder and I, with Roger and Margarita leaning over the rail. She had on a long, tight-fitting travelling coat of slate grey and a quaint, soft little felt hat with a greyish-white gull that sprawled over the top of it. She looked taller than I had ever seen her, and her hair, drawn up high on her head, made her face more like a cameo than ever, for she was pale from the excitement and fatigue of shopping. On her hand, as she waved it with that lovely, free curve of all her gestures, shone the great star sapphire Roger had bought her, set heavily about with brilliants, a wonderful thing: all cloudy and grey, like her eyes, and then all densely blue, like her eyes, and now stormy and dark, like her eyes, and always, and most of all, like her eyes, with that fiery blue point lurking in the heart of it.

It was her birth stone—an odd bit of sentimental superstition for Roger to have cherished—and his own as well, for they were both born in September. Her father had told her of this on one of the few occasions when he seemed to have talked with her at any length, and like all his remarks it had made a great impression upon her. Anything more violently at odds with the theory of planetary influence it

would be hard to find, for two people more fundamentally unlike each other than Roger and his wife, I never met.

And yet . . . and yet (for I am not so sure as to what is "absurd" now that my half-century milestone is well behind, and those months in Egypt taught me that much of the inexplicable is terribly true) shall I leave out of this rambling tale the moment of attention due the old horoscopist of Paris? I think not.

He was withered and heavily spectacled and absent-minded to a degree I have never seen equalled. Shall I ever forget the day he made a soapy mixture in a great tin pan in his little garret in the Rue Serpente, produced a long, clean clay pipe, delivered to me a neat if extraordinary little lecture on the experiment he was about to make and the inferences I must draw from it if it succeeded—and then, with his prismatic bubbles all unblown, gravely sat down in the pan! He gazed stupefied at me when I pointed out his error.

"*Il ne manquerait que ça!*" he snapped at length, and as he had no other suit of clothes, he went resignedly to bed and discoursed there most learnedly. He was seventy-five then and his great treatise was but one-third done: the *concierge* told me long after his death that his last living act was to burn it, with the tears streaming down his old face, poor old fellow! And yet he was one of the happiest people I have ever known. The *concierge* was terribly afraid of him, because he had once in his dry, detached way presented that official with a complete chart of his life, temperament and just deserts, neatly done in coloured inks and mounted on cardboard. It was so devilishly accurate that the *concierge* trembled whenever he passed it, which was frequently, as his wife had it framed and hung it in their bedroom.

To old Papa Morel, then, I propounded the problem of accounting for Margarita's birth-month having been Roger's, and even within the same week. Pressed for the year of her

birth, I made her twenty-two, at which the old man scowled and muttered and traced with his cracked yellow nail devious courses through his great map of the heavens. To tease him I enumerated a few of her qualities and habits, all to be thoroughly accounted for in my estimation, by her strange environment and bringing up; but far from exasperating him further, as I had supposed it would, this recital appeared to please him mightily. Shaking his finger reprovingly, he advised me no longer to mock myself of him, for unknown to myself I had exposed my own deceit: was I so utterly unversed in the heavenly politics as not to know that this person described herself fully as having been born four years previous to the date I had given him, in the year of the eclipse, which was moreover a comet-year and one in which Uranus usurped the throne of reigning planets, and breaking all bounds, shadowed that fateful season? That Aquarius, drawn by him, had imposed himself, too, and affected the very Moon in her courses? Indeed she would be an unbelievable person, that one! But assuredly she was born in the year 186—. And when we finally found the year of Margarita's birth, it was precisely the year stated by Papa Morel! He told me, moreover, that she would be a great artist, at which I laughed, for her future life was fairly well mapped out for her, I fancied, knowing Roger as I did. He told me that she would be in grave danger of death within three years, and then, turning to a horoscope of my own which he had insisted upon drawing, he ran his yellow finger down to a point and raising his mild, fanatic eyes to mine, remarked that at precisely that time it was written that I should save life! At which I smiled politely and said that I hoped I should save Margarita's and he replied politely that as to that he did not know.

"You will remark," he added, "that persons born in that month of that year will never be otherwise than far out of the ordinary. No. And mostly artists: dramatic, musical—how should I know? You will remark, also, that they will

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indubitably possess great influence over the lives of others—and why not, with Uranus in that House as he is, opposing the Moon? Ah, yes, her life is not yet lived, that one!"

But on the Saturday that found us waving from the pier I had not met the good old Morel, and I was not thinking of the planets at all. It had just come over me with dreadful distinctness that from now on my life could never, never be the same. When I had first parted from Roger and Margarita, the poetic strangeness of their surroundings, the shock of all the discoveries I had just made, the relief of finding our friendship secured on a new footing, nay, the very darkness of the mild evening through which I was rowed away from them after that exciting day, all combined to blunt my sense of loneliness, to invest it with a gentle, dreamy pathos that made philosophy not too hard. It was like leaving Ferdinand and Miranda on their Isle of Dreams, with my blessing. But here were no Ferdinand and Miranda; only a handsome, well-dressed bride and her handsome, well-dressed husband-lover, sailing off for a brilliantly happy honeymoon and leaving me behind! The excitement was gone, the past was over, the future seemed dreadfully dull. My English blood, the blood of the small land-owner, with occasional military generations, forbade my plunging into the routine of business, in the traditional American fashion, even had the need of it been more pressing. It may as well be admitted here and now that I was not ambitious; I never (fortunately!) felt the need of glory or high places and my simple fortune was to me wealth and to spare—Margarita's pearl was the greatest extravagance of my life. Up to this point I had never seriously realised that all the little, comfortable details of that little, comfortable bachelor life of ours were over and done, the rooms into which we had fitted so snugly, rented, perhaps, at that moment, the table at the club no longer ours by every precedent, the vacations no more to be planned together and enjoyed together.

The ship drew out into the harbour and I leaned hard

on my stick and wondered drearily how long I was likely to live. Oh, I admit the shamefulness of my unmanly state! I might have been drying the orphan's tear or making Morris chairs or purifying local politics, but I wasn't.

Tip Elder walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Well, *that* baby's face is washed!" he said cheerily, "as my mother puts it. And I hope it's going to turn out all right. But I don't believe you or I would be in Roger's shoes for a good deal, would we?"

I turned on him fiercely.

"Speak for yourself, Elder!" I cried. "I'd give most of this life that I know about and all of the next that you don't, to be for a little while in Roger's shoes! Understand that!"

And brushing by him and utterly neglecting Sue and the Wolcott Searses, I jumped into a waiting cab and hurried away from that departing vessel, with two-thirds of what I loved in the world on her deck.

I took one last look at our old rooms, bare and clean, now, for my things were sold and Roger's stored; I gave all my clothes to the house valet, to his intense gratitude, and when, with a nervous blow of my favourite cane—a gift from Roger—in an effort to beat the pile of cloth on the floor into symmetrical shape, the stick broke in the middle, I came as near to an hysterical laugh as I ever came in my life.

"Take all the other sticks, Hodgson," I said huskily, "and the racquets, if you want them. And give the rod to the night porter—Richard fishes, I know. And take the underwear, too—yes, all of it!"

"And the trunk, sir? Where would you wish——"

"O Lord, take the trunk!" I burst out, for the familiar labels, ay, the very dints in the brass lock, carried only sour memories to me, now.

"But, sir, you've only what you stand in!" the man cried, convinced, I am certain, that I contemplated suicide. "I've

got the day to get through, Hodgson," I reassured him, "and the shops will be of great assistance!"

I left him gloating over his windfall, and plunged into haberdashery.

Fortunately for my nervous loathing of all my old possessions, I had celebrated Uncle Win's legacy by a prompt visit to my tailor, and the results of this visit went far to stock the new leather trunk that I recklessly purchased for the shocking price such commodities command in America. At the end of a successfully costly day I registered myself, the trunk, with its brilliant identification label, a new silver-topped blackthorn, and the best bull terrier I could get in New York, at the new monster hotel I had never before entered, with a strange feeling of an identity as new as my overcoat. This terrier, by the way, marked my definite division from Roger more than anything else could have done. I have always been fond of animals, dogs especially, and as a little fellow was never without some ignominiously bred cur at my heels; but Roger never cared for them, and little by little I had dropped the attempt to keep one, since he objected to exercising them in town, did not care to bother with them in the country, and absolutely refused to endure the encumbrance of one while travelling. Not that he was ever cruel or careless: when thrown into necessary relations with animals he was far more just and thoughtful of them than many a sentimental animal lover of my acquaintance! Strangely enough, I have never seen a dog or cat that would not go to him in preference to almost anyone else—one of nature's ironies.

With Kitchener (not of Khartoum, then!) curled at the foot of my bed in a brand new collar, I went to sleep, woke early, and took the first train to Stratford to say good-bye to my mother and receive her congratulations on my legacy.

Everything was unchanged in the neat little house: only old Jeanne in her bed in a wonderful nightcap marked the visit as different from any other. Years had ceased to leave

any mark on my mother since her hair had turned grey, and I might have been a collegian again as I kissed her.

What extraordinary creatures women are! She knew inside of ten minutes, I am sure, as well as Sarah Bradley had known, how matters stood with me, and whenever I spoke of Margarita an inscrutable look was in her eye and she stroked my arm in a delicate, mute sympathy. Nor did she refer to my children any more or her hopes that I would *ranger* myself and settle down. If she sighed a little at the news of my projected *wander jahr*, she did not beg me to set any term for it, and cheerfully congratulated herself upon my known faithfulness in the matter of correspondence. The tact of the woman!

She herself cooked our simple dinner to Jeanne's voluble accompaniment of regret: the chicken from her own brood, the salad from her garden, the delicious pastry that her own hands had put into the oven. After dinner, during which we drank Jeanne's health and took her a glass of the wine I always brought with me for the stocking of her unpretentious cellar (the neighbours had never been able to regard this addition to my mother's table without suspicion and regret) my father's favourite brand of cigars was produced and I dutifully smoked one. I had not inherited his taste in this instance, but for years I had respectfully made this filial sacrifice and my mother would have been seriously hurt had I foregone it.

We talked of anything but what was in our minds: the wonderful late planting of peas; the beauties of Kitchener, who was formally introduced to Jeanne and listened with perfect good breeding to a long account (in French) of the departed family poodle; the kindness of the old parish priest to Jeanne; the war-scare in the East (my mother religiously took in the London Times and watched Russia with unceasing vigilance) the shocking price of meat. Later she brought out my old violin and I played all her favourites while she accompanied me on the little cottage piano my

father had bought for her when they began life together. If a tear dropped now and then on the yellow keys, neither of us took it too seriously, and it was a pleasant, soothing evening on the whole. My nerves relaxed unconsciously, and Jeanne's wild applause as one after another of her particular tunes rang out (*Parlons-nous de lui, Grandmère, Sous les Tilleuls* and *Je sais bien, mon amour*) gave me an absurd thrill of musicianly vanity.

I slept in my own little room with the prim black walnut bedroom suit, the prize-books in a row on the corner shelf, the worn rug made from the minister's calf that I shot by mistake, and my father's sword, with its faded tassel, over my bed. By some odd chance all my dreams that night were of those boyish days, and it was with sincere surprise that I stared on waking at my long moustache, in the toilet mirror —we were not so universally clean shaven twenty years ago.

My steamer sailed at noon from Boston, and to my intense delight there was no one on board that I knew. Unattended and unwept Kitchener and I marched up the gang plank, and I pointed out to him the conveniences and eccentricities of his surroundings with the contented confidence known only to the intimate friend of a good dog. For Kitchener and I were already intimate: the cynical philosophy, the sentimental maundering, the firm resolutions I had poured out in his well-clipped ear had brought us very close together, and had he chosen to betray my confidences he could have made a great fool of me, I can tell you.

I can see him now—good old Kitch! With a great black patch over one roving blue eye and an inky paw, a trim, taut body and a masterful tail, he travelled more miles than fall to the lot of most bull dogs and got quite as much good out of them as most of his fellow travellers. He would have chased an elephant if I had told him to and carried bones to a cat if I had ordered it done. He is buried next to Mr. Boffin the poodle, in quiet Stratford, and for many years his grave was tended—for Harriet never forgot.

Though I had made no formal decision as to where I would go, somewhere in the back of my brain it had been made for me. That astonishing young Anglo-Indian had not at that time reminded us that "when you 'ear the East a callin', why, you don't 'eed nothing else" (I quote from memory and far from libraries) but it was true, for all that, and I knew the skies that waited for me—the low, kindling stars, the warm, intimate wind, the very feel of the earth under my feet.

And yet I did not go there, after all. We were bound for England, and as I travelled up the Devon country and drank in the pure, homelike landscape and strolled by those incomparable (if occasionally malarial) cottages, my father's and grandfather's blood stirred in me, and half consciously, to tell the truth, I found myself on the way to Oxford. By some miracle of chance my old lodgings were free, and before I quite realised what I was doing, I was making myself comfortable in them.

I should have hated to be obliged to explain to my incredulous American friends what I "did" in those long months, when every week I planned to be off for the South and every week found me still lingering by the emerald close, the grey tower, the quiet, formal place of this backwater of the world. In their sense, of course, I "did" nothing at all. I watched the youth around me (any one of them I might have been, had my father lived) I renewed the quiet, cordial friendships, which, if they never rooted very deep, never, on the other hand, desiccated and blew away; I wrote many letters, and more than this, I formulated once for all, though I did not know it then, such theory of life as I have found necessary ever since. What it may have been does not so much matter: if I have failed to illustrate it in my life, if I have, even, failed to make it reasonably clear in this rough sketch of the most vital interests of my life, it cannot have been very valuable.

Among my correspondents at this time neither Roger nor

his wife was numbered. This was not strange, for he was a poor letter-writer, except for business purposes or in a real necessity, and she had never been taught so much as to write her own name! But I heard from them indirectly, and as Roger, it turned out, supposed me to have gone on a long hunting trip through the Rockies, neither of us was alarmed by the three months' silence.

A strange, dozing peace had settled over me; though I thought of them often, it was as one thinks of persons and scenes infinitely removed, with which he has no logical connection, only a veiled, softened interest. Margarita seemed, against the background of the moist, pearly English autumn, like some gorgeous and unbelievable tropical bird, shooting, all orange and indigo, across a grey cloud. It was impossible that I, a quiet chess-player sitting opposite his friend, the impractical student of Eastern Religions, could have to do with such a vivid anomaly as she must always be. It was unlikely that the silent, moody man strolling for hours through mist-filled English lanes, pipe in mouth, dog at heels should ever run athwart that lovely troubler of man's mind, that babyish woman, that all-too-well-ripened child.

My Christmas holidays were quietly passed with the Oriental Professor in his tiny Surrey cottage, where he and his dear old sister, a quaint little vignette of a woman, forgot the world among her pansy beds. She was not visible at that time, however, owing to a teasing influenza which kept her in bed, and our hostess was her trained nurse, a quiet, capable little American, with a firm hand-grip and kind brown eyes, already set in fine, watchful wrinkles. She rarely spoke, except in the obvious commonplaces of courtesy, and our days were wonderfully still. The Professor taught me Persian, in a desultory way, and chess most rigorously, for he was hard put to it for an opponent even partly worthy of his prodigious skill. He was a member of all the most select societies of learning in the world, an Egyptologist of such standing that his pronouncements

in that field were practically final, a man called before kings to determine the worth of their national treasures and curiosities—and his greatest pride was that he had beaten the hitherto unmatched mechanical chess-player in public contest and had been invited to settle absolutely the nicest problems in a chess magazine!

I dwell with a curious fondness upon this placid interval in my life. I supposed myself honestly settled, grown old, grateful for the rest and oblivion my father's old university gave me so generously. When I thought of the feverish, break-neck journey I had planned, of the hot and doubtful reliefs and distractions I had promised myself that day when the lawyers' letter had dropped half read on my knees and I had sniffed my freedom first, I wondered. But, truly, it is all written, and the hour had not yet struck, that was all!

CHAPTER XVI

MARGARITA COMES TO TOWN

[From Sue Paynter]

Washington Square,
Oct. 16, 188—

Jerry Dear:

First about the will—how splendid it was! Nothing could have pleased Roger more, I am sure—he told me with that queer, little whimsical grimace of his that it cleared his conscience to feel he was leaving you *something!* What a personality he has, and how, in his quiet unassuming way, he impresses it on us!

I hear that Sarah made a great fuss about the will, but was advised by Mr. Sears to stop—and stopped! With Madame B. I am of course anathema—I have not heard from her since. The bank, *bien entendu*, is of the past, and you, I hear, are in the far West. How you will revel in the freedom and how good it must have been to kick off the ball and chain! If anyone can be trusted not to abuse leisure, it is you, dear Jerry—you won't appear so culpable, as a poor American always does, somehow, under such circumstances. Even I feel unjustifiably idle now, so I have taken up some of Mr. Elder's fads—what a fine, manly sort of fellow he is!—and may be seen, *moi qui vous parle*, teaching sight-reading to a boy's glee-club!

But of course you are impatiently waiting for me to turn to Margarita and leave this silly chatter about my egotistic self. *Eh bien*, she is marvellous. For half an hour I hated her, but I couldn't hold out any longer. I have never even imagined such a person. What a pose that would be if any actress were clever enough to avail herself of the un-

paralleled opportunities it would give her! Of course I thought it *was* a pose, at first—I simply couldn't believe in her. But equally of course no woman could deceive another woman very long at that, and she is one to conquer both sexes. When she put her hand in mine and asked if I was going to buy her some dresses on Broadway, I had to kiss her.

I got very little, just enough for absolute necessity, and gave her a letter to my woman in Paris and another to one I could only afford occasionally, and told her to obey them and take what they gave her. She understood and promised not to buy what happened to strike her—this was necessary, for she begged piteously for a rose pink satin street dress and a yellow velvet opera cloak to wear on the boat! We had a terrible struggle over a corset—she screamed when the *corsetière* and I got her into one and slapped the poor woman in the face. It took all my diplomacy to cover the affair and I doubt if I could have done it, really, if Margarita herself had not suddenly begun to cry like a frightened baby and begged pardon so sincerely that the woman was melted and ended by offering her sister as a maid! The girl had the best of references, and as she must have someone and Elise has travelled extensively and seems very tactful, she is now (I trust) adjusting the elastic girdle her sister finally induced Margarita to wear.

I took her to my Sixth Avenue shoe place, and she was so ravished with a pair of pale blue satin *mules* I got her that she actually leaned down and kissed the clerk who was kneeling before her! Fortunately we were in a private room and he was the cleverest possible young Irishman, who winked gravely at me and took it as naturally as possible—he thought she was not responsible, you see, and assured me that he had an aunt in the old country who was just that way!

What a beautiful voice she has—have you ever heard it drop a perfect minor third? But what a strange, strange wife for Roger, of all men! I suppose she is the first thoroughly unconventional person he was ever closely connected with—in one way *you* would seem more natural with her —I suppose because you are more adaptable than Roger.

With him, everybody must adapt. Will she! *Voila l'affaire!* I should say that the young woman would be likely to have great influence over other people's lives, herself. If she and Roger ever clash—! Ah, well, *advienne que pourra*, it's done.

I gave her for a wedding present that lovely little old daguerreotype of Roger at three years old. It was in an old leather frame, you know, and I had it taken out and put into a little band of steel pearls and hung on a small dark red velvet standard. No one could fail to know him from it—I think it is the most wonderful child portrait I ever saw. He seems to have always had that straight, steady look. There is a tiny curl of yellow baby hair in the back, which amused her very much. That is the only one of him at that age, you know—his mother gave it to me when we were engaged, and I always kept it.

I am forgetting to tell you about our visit to the Convent, and you must hear it. I love the old place and often go up there to see Mary, when things grow a little too unbearable. She is wonderful—so placid and bright, so somehow just like herself, when you expect something different! Why did she do it, I wonder? I was one of her best friends, and I never knew. Her great executive ability is having its reward, they tell me, and she is likely to be Mother Superior some day.

I had told her about Margarita and she was deeply interested in her, though the terrible state of the child's soul naturally alarmed her. When I told her that her sister-in-law had never been in a church, nor seen one, unless she had noticed those we passed in New York, she crossed herself hastily and such a look of real, heartfelt pain passed over her face!

Well, I got my charge safely up there, and everything interested her tremendously from the very beginning. It was the intermission *demi-heure* of the morning and the girls were all munching their *gouter* and playing about on the grass. I explained to her why they all wore the same black uniform, and why the honour girls, "*les très-biens*," wore the broad blue sashes under their arms, and why the Sisters kept on their white headdresses in the house, and why

the girls all made their little *révérence* when Mother Bradley came out to meet us. She kissed Margarita so sweetly and held her in her arms a moment—I don't think Roger quite realised how his attitude hurts her: it is the only almost unjust thing I ever knew him to do. In the halls there is a great statue of Christ blessing the children, and Margarita stopped and stared at it several minutes, while we watched her. She seemed so rapt that Mary took my hand excitedly and whispered to me not to disturb her for the world, but wait for what she would say. After a while she turned to me.

"Why has that woman a beard, Sue?" she asked cheerfully. Imagine my feelings! I did not dare look at Mary.

We went all through the school-rooms and she was most curious about the globes and blackboards and pianos. We stopped at the door of a tiny music room, and I smiled, as I always do, at the pretty little picture. The young girl with her Gretchen braids of yellow hair, straight-backed in front of the piano, the nervous, grey-haired little music master watchfully posted behind her, beating time, and in the corner the calm-faced Sister, pink-cheeked under her spreading cap, knitting, with constantly moving lips. The music rooms are so wee that the group seemed like a gracefully posed *genre* picture. Before we knew what she was about, Margarita had slipped in behind the music master and brought both hands down with a crash on the keys, so that the Chopin Prelude ended abruptly in an hysterical wail and the young lady half fell off the stool—only half, for Margarita pushed her the rest of the way, I regret to say. Fortunately Mary was able to get us out of it, but I fear there was no more Prelude that day! Why will women play Chopin, by the way? I never heard one who could—Aus der Ohe is masculine enough, heaven knows, but even that amount of talent doesn't seem to accomplish it. Do you remember Frederick's diatribes on the subject? He used to say that Congress should forbid Chopin to women, on pain of life imprisonment.

But you must hear the end of the visit. We went into Mary's room—perfectly bare, you know, with a great crucifix on the wall and below it, part of the woodwork, a little cup for holy water. As soon as she entered the room

MARGARITA STOPPED AND STARED AT IT SEVERAL MINUTES

Margarita paused, and gave a sort of gasp—her hand, which I held tight in mine, grew cold as ice. She moved over slowly to the crucifix, with her eyes glued to it—she seemed utterly unconscious of us, or where she was; she stood directly under the crucifix, with Mary and me on either side of her shaking with excitement, and then she put out her hand in a wavering, unsteady way, like a blind person, dipped her fingers in the empty bowl and began to cross herself! She touched her forehead quickly, then moved her hand slowly down her chest, fumbled toward one side, then drew a long breath and stared at us, winking like a baby.

"I wish I had some food, Sue," she said, and actually yawned and stretched her arms, like a plow-boy, in our faces. "I think this room makes me hungry. Are you not hungry, Mary?"

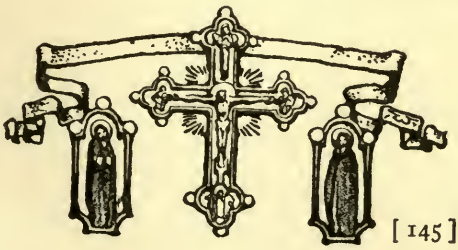
Now, Jerry, what do you make of that? She cannot have seen a crucifix, can she? Nor anyone crossing themselves? She acted like a woman walking in her sleep. If I lived in Boston and were interested in that sort of thing I could swear that she had been a nun in her last incarnation!

Mary is, of course, much wrought up, and is going to set the whole convent praying for her, I believe. I told Roger about it, but you know what he is—it sounded rather silly as soon as I had it begun. He pointed out that there were plenty of chances for her to have seen the Sisters crossing themselves before crucifixes, and other sensible explanations. But really and truly, Jerry, I was with her every minute, and she did what she had not seen done.

What do you think of it?

Yours always,

SUE PAYNTER.



PART FIVE

IN WHICH THE BROOK BECOMES A RIVER AND FLOWS BY GREAT CITIES

Now sit thee down, my bride, and spin,
  And fold thy hair more wifely yet,
The church hath purged our love from sin,
Now art thou joined to homely kin,
  The salten sea thou must forget.

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER XVII

OUR PEARL BATHES IN SEINE WATER

BLEEKS, LITTLE ARCHES, SURREY,
January 2d, 188—

MY DEAR MR. JERROLDS:

You will be surprised, doubtless, to hear from an old woman who is *perfectly unknown* to you in all probability, but if your mother is still living she will remember Agatha Upgrove and the cups of tea and dishes of innocent scandal she shared with her, when you were rolling in a perambulator. I write to you instead of to her in order to find out if she is living, in fact, and to renew at sixty-two the friendship of *twenty-six!* You may well wonder at such a sudden impulse after thirty years, almost, of silence, and if you will pardon a garrulous old woman's epistolary ramblings, I will tell you, for you are at the bottom of it.

My grandniece was summoned hastily to Paris a month ago, to act as bridesmaid to a young school friend, and as no one else could well be spared at that time to go with the child, I offered myself. I am an experienced traveller and even at *my* age think far less of a trip across the Channel than most of my relatives do of one to India, with which, by the way, I am also familiar. It was when my husband's (and your father's) regiment was ordered to India that your mother and I met. You came very near being born there, did you know it? But the regiment was recalled, and we came back *delighted*, for neither of us liked it. Major Upgrove died of dysentery a year later, and my widowhood and your father's absence in Africa at that time drew your mother and me very close together. One wonders that *such* intimacies should ever fade, but I have seen it *too often* to regard it as anything but natural, alas! It was my son, Captain

Arthur Upgrove of the ——th Hussars, who taught you to walk —I can see you now, with the lappets of your worked muslin cap flying in the wind, and *such* a serious expression!

But to return to my trip to Paris. I established my niece comfortably with her friends, and then betook myself to my own devices till such time as she should need me again. I had not been in Paris for eight years (one settles down so *amazingly* in provincial England!) and I derived great pleasure from the old scenes of my honeymoon, that sad pleasure which is all that is left to women of my age, who have not their grandchildren to renew their youth in!

The Major and I had always been *particularly* attached to the Gardens of the Luxembourg, and there I went and sat musing many hours on end. One morning as I sat watching the children and their *bonnes*, my ear was caught by a shrill scream and I turned and saw a very handsome young woman, beautifully dressed, dragging a cup and ball away from an angry little French boy. I supposed, of course, that she was his mother or his aunt, and only regretted that she should be so rough and undignified in her manner to him, but when his nurse rushed up and angrily questioned the young woman, who fought her off, still clinging to the toy, I realised that something was wrong, and went over to them. Hardly had I got there when a neat-looking lady's maid ran up, chid the young woman severely, and apologised in a rapid flood of French, that I could not follow, to the nurse. Then it was clear (or so I thought) that the poor creature was *not responsible* and I tried to soothe her, in a quiet way, till her attendant should leave the *bonne*.

To make a long story short, imagine my surprise when I found that she was not insane at all, only strangely undeveloped. Her maid explained this to me while the curious young thing (a *bride*, too!) actually made friends with the child and begged the cup and ball away successfully!

She took quite a fancy to me and we talked together in English, as soon as I found out that she was an American. What an *extraordinary* nation! It quite makes one giddy to think of them. Fancy a child that had never been taught of the God who made her nor the Saviour who died for her, in a civilised *Christian* country! And yet she was naturally

very sweet, I found, though high-tempered. She spoke beautiful French (they tell me Americans often do) but she seemed to know very little about her native country and had never seen a red Indian nor a buffalo. The Major always regretted so *deeply* that he had never hunted in North America.

During our conversation, which I should hardly dare to repeat, it was so *very* odd, she told me that she was very glad to have found another friend, for now she had three, besides her husband.

"And who are the other two, my dear?" I asked her.

"One is Sue, that is a woman," she answered, "and the other is Jerry, that is a man."

"Jerry? Jerry?" I repeated, for it sounded strangely familiar.

"Yes. Do you know him, too?" she asked eagerly.

"I am afraid not," I said, "but it so happens that I once knew a baby boy whom his mother called Jerry many years ago, in England."

"*My* Jerry gave me this pearl," she said, and she showed me a beautiful pearl which she wore.

"I do not think it likely that the Jerry I knew would be able to afford such presents," I said *rather stiffly*. You must know, Mr. Jerrolds, that we are still *old-fashioned* in our ideas in England, and fail to realise the quick growth of your amazing American fortunes!

She persisted, however, and to quiet her I told her that "my Jerry's" right name was Winfred Jerrolds. When she assured me that it *was* "her Jerry" and described your appearance (exactly your father's, except that he required a *pince-nez*), I began to believe in the *strange coincidence*, and readily agreed to go home with her. She lived in a charming *appartement* (I have forgotten the street, but they were *au cinquieme*, and there was a queer little hydraulic lift, which I refused to use, preferring my own feet) and she did the honours of it very prettily, upon the whole, like a child that is just learning, looking to her maid constantly for approval.

This, frankly, did not seem right to me, Mr. Jerrolds. I may be *old-fashioned*, but I cannot think that a woman should learn *etiquette* from her *maid*, and I must have showed my

feeling in my face, for the girl, a capable one, I must say, blushed and said that in her opinion Madame required a governess, a *chaperon*, as it were, and that she believed Monsieur had it in his mind also. I could not help exclaiming that I knew of the *very person*, and most officiously, I know, I wrote down the address of a second cousin of mine, once removed, then in Paris by the merest chance.

She is a Miss Jencks, Mr. Jerrolds, and of *unexceptionable* family: her great-uncle a bishop, her father a retired army officer. She has been governess to the family of the Governor-General of Canada, thus, as you see, enabling her to know just what would be required in American society (the maid told me that Mr. Bradley was most *aristocratic* and quite wealthy) and has always associated with the *best people*. She is plain, but refined, and unusually well educated, being in Paris now for special art study. She would be moderate in her charges, I am sure, and would take a *real interest* in young Mrs. Bradley, for she deeply enjoys forming character and manners and has always been considered *most successful* at it.

I wrote down the address of her *pension* and left it with the maid, telling her, so that Mr. Bradley would not think me *too* forward, that I was an old friend of your mother. Do, if you write to him, say a good word for Miss Jencks, for I am sure he will never regret engaging her.

Before I left, Mrs. Bradley sang for me, accompanying herself on the piano. Her voice is unusually fine, though she does not sing at all in the English way, but more like a *professional* opera singer. It was rather startling to me. Barbara Jencks could teach her a little more restraint, I think, to great advantage. But there is no doubt of the beauty of the organ. She is taking lessons of a famous teacher, and the maid says she had made the most *wonderful* progress in a short time. She is a very loving little creature (I call her little, though she is half a head taller than I!) but though she is so childish, I fancy she has a *very* strong will and a character of her own. She would have a *great influence* over anyone that was much with her, I think.

I am sending this letter in care of your mother's old bankers. I hope so much that I may hear that she is alive and

well! I was never better myself. I enclose with this long letter a picture of my son. Like your mother, I have but one, and he is *everything* to me, as I daresay hers is.

I trust that you will not come to England without letting me see you at Bleeks, and remain, my dear Mr. Jerrolds, Your mother's old friend,

AGATHA UPGROVE.

[FROM ROGER'S DIARY]

PARIS, Feb. 17, '8–

Weather fine and clear for a week. M. well and very happy. Her voice certainly comes on surprisingly. Mme. M——i very enthusiastic. Miss J. has persuaded her to learn to write. She makes great progress.

Feb. 24.

To-night we actually gave a little dinner. Friends of Miss J.'s: a sort of practice affair. M. behaved very well, but drank her neighbour's (Miss J.'s cousin's) wine and would not apologise. Miss J. a little inclined to be over-severe, I think. It will be very pleasant to entertain, later, certainly. Spent the morning at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, reading up *Code Napoleon*. What a man! I never thought enough emphasis laid on that side of him.

Mar. 3.

Bad weather over for the present. Called at the Legation. M. very quiet and good and looking exquisite in dark blue silk from Sue's crack dressmaker. Enormously admired and very happy. Quite well. Took a few notes to-day on the *Code*. A great lawyer, that man.

Mar. 6.

Wonderful weather, fine and warm. Chestnuts soon starting. Went to Versailles for the day. M. played cup and ball with R——n, the sculptor, who wants to model her. He gave us a *petit souper* and M. behaved perfectly. Miss

J. certainly an investment. She cannot drag M. into a cathedral, however. M. insists they make her feel queer and then hungry. Says her hands get cold. Have told Miss J. cannot have any meddling with religion just yet. (N. B. not at all!) Strange not hearing from Jerry.

Mar. 10.

M. spoke of old home to-day for first time. Remarked on absence of ocean and hoped dog was well. Dog's name appears to be Rosy, which is absurd, as it's not that kind of dog. Obstinate as usual. Miss J. objects to kissing as a disciplinary measure. M. balks at Kings of England in order, and gets no dessert. Odd thing to have happen to your wife! She grows sweeter every day. Am getting quite deep into notes on the *Code*. Really enough for a book.

Mar. 15.

Weather still holds. Met Stokes and Remsen of my class to-day and went out to St. Cloud with them. Say I look five years younger. Didn't realise I needed the rest, to tell the truth. Suppose we do work too steadily, over there. But I never felt any ill effects from it. Have cabled Jerry at University Club. Remsen swears he saw him in London last week. Doesn't seem possible, or would have known. M. sang to-day at *musicale* for Mme. M——i. Great success and looked very beautiful. She gets a high colour singing. Hate Frenchmen as much as I ever did. They're more monkey than man. Magnificent new tenor-barytone just discovered—can't recall the name. Wants to sing with M., who was much taken with him. Worked up a few of my notes: Stokes thought well of them.

Mar. 16.

Barytone called while I was out with Miss J. yesterday on business. M. told me that he loved her and admits that he kissed her. Went around to his rooms and gave him a good licking this afternoon: warm work, for he is a big fellow.

M. cannot see anything out of the way in what she did: told me she wished she'd married Jerry, I was so cruel. Miss J. talked to her like a Dutch uncle. Can't have the child treated too harshly for all the Governor-Generals Canada ever had, and told her so. We all got pretty hot, but nothing would budge M. till Elise happened to confide in her that I was a man in a thousand. This for some reason struck her forcibly and she acted like an angel. Women are certainly strange. Nothing more done on the *Code.*

FLORENCE, Mar. 26.

Have been a week here. M. enjoys it very much. She and Miss J. studying Italian day and night: M. takes to it like a duck to water. Got a grammar myself and began. M. practises faithfully. Some pleasant old ladies I knew in New Haven called on us to-day and M.'s behaviour could not have been better, I thought, though Miss J. objects to her crossing her ankles. She writes very well now. It is better than a play to hear her and Miss J. arguing over points of etiquette. J. explained the theory of the chaperon, but M. pinned her down to admitting that it did not apply to married women. Then why to her? M. demanded imperiously. J. shuffled a little, then explained that M. was an exceptional married woman. M. inquired if that meant that she was the only married woman that could not be trusted alone with a man. J. replied "Unfortunately, no, Mrs. Bradley!" M. scored, in my opinion.

April 2.

Long cable to-day about Wilkes case. Cannot possibly attend to it from here. Cabled to make every effort to postpone it. Bound to get in a mess, if they don't. R—— should have been disbarred long ago. M. spoke again of the beach at home to-day. The second time since we were married. Sometimes I think she has no heart, in the ordinary sense, and then again her sweetness and kindness would

win over a statue. She cannot, of course, be judged by ordinary standards.

April 6.

Heard from Jerry to-day. Has been in England all the time, the rascal, playing chess and learning Persian! Has promised to run over to Paris and we are going back there. M. wants to go on with her music lessons. Have never known her so steady at anything. Expected to stay here indefinitely, but must be very patient with her now. Is wonderfully well. Wouldn't mind getting back to work, myself, but she can't very well sail now, I suppose.

Paris, April 11.

Perfect weather. Paris very gay. As a holiday, all very well: as a business, what a life! Mme. M——i advises stop lessons now for a while. M. very disappointed, but yields finally very gracefully. How changed Jerry will find her! He agrees to stay a fortnight at least, which delights M. And me, too. We must have one of our old walking-trips, perhaps try an ascension. Have got at the *Code* again.

April 15.

Weather still holds. Jerry expected to-morrow. M. has taken to reading. She and J. read aloud *David Copperfield*, turn about. What good work it is, after all! Hester taught her to read unknown to her father, who seems to have forbidden it. It was her only disobedience, it seems. I wonder what that woman's real name was? She learned to read from the Psalms, but never read much. The Wilkes case going badly, I'm afraid: no postponement. They will be able to appeal, however.

CHAPTER XVIII

MY PEARL OF TOO GREAT PRICE

KITCHENER and I were very philosophic as we crossed the Channel that fine day in April. We had got thoroughly fitted to each other, now, the rough edges smoothed down, all idiosyncrasies allowed for; we knew when to press hard, so to speak, and when to go light, and the result was a good, seasoned intimacy that lasted twelve long years.

I have always been a good sailor, a slight headache in an unusually nasty roll being my only concession to Neptune, and Kitch and I viewed with cynical tolerance the depressing antics of our less fortunate fellow-travellers. As we neared the French coast I realised gradually how good it would be to see Roger again, and found time to regret a little of my solitary lingering through the damp English winter, which seemed more oppressive in retrospect than it had been in reality.

For Margarita I had only the kindest feelings and the friendliest hopes that she would develop into a good wife for Roger. To marry such a bewitching knot of possibilities was of course more or less a risk, but on the other hand, if any man could succeed in such an undertaking, surely that man was our placid, patient Roger! I had learned patience myself during the winter, by dint of chess and philosophy, and somehow, as the little Channel boat pitched under me and the shifty April clouds rolled along the sky over me, life, as it stretched out for me and Kitchener, was not too gloomy: was even flavoured with a certain easy freedom that rather tickled my middle-aged epicurean palate

—for the middle thirties were, even twenty years ago, reasonably middle-aged.

Nevertheless it was impossible not to remember that my feelings had not always been thus ordered, and when, a few hours later, the guard let me out of the carriage, and I saw only Roger on the platform, I realised that I had braced myself a little for a meeting that did not take place.

"It's good to see you again, Jerry," he said heartily, "mighty good!" And with his hand gripping mine, I had a moment of whimsical wonder that any woman born should have been able to threaten such a friendship for (or by!) the twinkling of an eye.

We talked of our plans, mine, such as they were, being only too ready to merge into his, which included a stiff climb through the Swiss Alps; of my Oxford sojourn; of Margarita's music and his readiness to get back to America as soon as she should feel equal to it. It amused me a little to discover how simply Roger accepted his rôle of indulgent American husband: those men are born to it, I believe—there seems no crisis, no period of instruction, even. I never pretended to half his real strength of character, but I could not have imagined myself stopping in circumstances more or less distasteful to me until my wife's whim should release us! I had spoken to no woman for many months, you must remember, but my landlady and the Professor's trained nurse, and unflattering though it may sound to the much-desired sex, I had not been conscious of any special lack, after the first few weeks.

To this day I have never known the name of the street nor the number of that Paris *appartement*. We were deep in our plans for mountaineering, and except that I noted the wheezy little lift of Mrs. Upgrove's letter, I remember literally nothing about that excursion but the familiar odour of the Paris asphalt, the snapping and cracking of the Gallic horsewhip, and the smoke of my own cigarette which blew into my eyes as I threw it away on entering the house.

The late afternoon sun poured into the gay little drawing-room, all buff and dull rose, in the charming French style, and full of sweet spring flowers in bowls and square jars of Majolica ware. The height of the *appartement* made it delightfully airy and bright, and through the western windows I glimpsed the feathery tips of the delicate new green of the trees. A small grand piano stood near an open window and a gorgeous length of Chinese embroidery on the opposite wall was reflected in a tall, narrow mirror that doubled the apparent size of the room and gave a pleasant depth and richness to all the airy clearness of the spring that seemed to fairly incarnate itself in the spot and the hour. I have never liked Oriental embroideries since that day, and the clogging scent of hyacinth is a thing I would take some trouble to avoid; those sad little spires of violet, pink and white spell only sorrow to one man, at least: sorrow and memories of pitiful and unmanly weakness.

For standing by the piano, one hand with its cloudy, flashing sapphire white among the pale stiff spikes, her deer-like head dark against the fantastic rose and orange of the embroidered dragons, was Margarita, a lovely smile curving her lips and the warm light in her deep slate-coloured eyes burning down, down into my very vitals. In that one rich, welcome smile all my calm English months melted like wax in a furnace, and Oxford was a drab dream and Surrey a stupid sick-bay! As I faced her, the old wound burst and widened, with that torturing sweet shock that I had relegated sagely to poets and youthful heats, and I knew that I loved her hopelessly, with a love that put out my love for Roger and my mother as the sun puts out the small and steady stars.

I had left a bewitching, unlikely elf; I found a magnificent woman. She seemed to my gloating eyes to have grown tall, though that might have been the effect of her loosely flowing, long-trained gown, which was as if she had put on a garment of shot green and blue silk and then another over it of rich, yellowish lace. The neck was cut in a sort of

square, such as one sees in the pictures of Venetian ladies in the *cinque cento*, and at the base of her full throat lay an antique necklace of aqua marines. Heavens! How perfect she was! As she moved over in her grand free stride and took my hands in both of hers, vitality and glowing strength seemed to pour along her veins into mine; she seemed almost extravagantly alive, and I a pallid, stupid dabbler on the shore of things. Her figure was much fuller; her arm, where the loose lace sleeve fell back from it, was plump and round, and this and the increased softness of her throat and chin added a year or two—yes, three or four —to what I had hitherto believed to be her age. She was a fit mate for Roger now; no longer a captured child-witch.

I bent over her hands, to cover my emotion, and ceremoniously kissed the backs of them; there was a creamy dimple below each finger now. As I lifted my head and heard Roger's chuckle of delight at my amazement at her, I saw for the first time that we three were not alone in the room, and found myself bowing to a neat, chill British spinster, big and white of tooth, big and flat of waist, big and bony of knuckle. She wore sensible, square-toed boots and the fashion of her clothing suggested a conscientious tailor who had momentarily lost sight of her sex. She bore a *pince-nez* upon her flat chest, the necessity for which was obvious, but her short-sighted blue eyes were kind and the grasp of her knuckly hand was human. She was a thorough-going lady if she was a trifle grotesque, and my respectful friendship for Barbara Jencks, late of the household of the Governor-General of Canada, has never waned.

"You find Mrs. Bradley somewhat changed, I dare say," she remarked, by way of breaking a rather strained silence, for Roger, never talkative, was hunting among a pile of guide-books and Margarita was staring dreamily into the sunset, now a miracle of golden rose.

"Somewhat, indeed," I responded politely, my mind darting back to that girl in the red jersey who had sat cross-legged like a Turk on the sand, and told me that I loved her. What would the Governor-General have thought of that girl?

Again a pause, and now Miss Jencks addressed Margarita, affectionately, but firmly—oh, very firmly!

"What do you find so absorbing out of the window, my dear?"

Margarita started like a forgetful child, blushed a little, murmured impatiently in French and then smiled delightfully at me.

"But this is Jerry, Miss Jencks, Roger's and my Jerry," she said beseechingly. "You do not mean that I must be polite to Jerry?"

"Most assuredly," returned Miss Jencks. "When a gentleman, even though he be an old friend, makes a journey to see one after a long absence, he expects and deserves to be entertained!"

Roger caught my eye, made his old whimsical grimace, and rooted deeper into the guide-books. Margarita sighed gently, seated herself in a high carved chair and inquired, with her lips, adorably after my health and my journey, but laughed naughtily with her eyes, an accomplishment so foreign to my knowledge of her as to reduce me to utter banality; which suited Miss Jencks perfectly, however, so that she resigned the conversational rudder to her pupil and concerned herself with knitting a hideous grey comforter (for the Seaman's Home, I learned later), giving the occupation a character worthy the most *comme-il-faut* clubman.

A neat, black uniformed *bonne* brought in tea, in the English fashion, and Margarita served us most charmingly under the eagle eye of Miss Jencks, eating, herself, like a hungry school-girl, and stealing Roger's cakes impudently when the some-time directress of the Governor-General's household affected a well-bred deafness to her request for

more. After tea Miss Jencks departed with her knitting and we three were comfortably silent; Margarita dreamy, I all in a maze at her, Roger relishing my wonder. The hyacinths smelled strong in the growing dusk, the Chinese dragons burned against the wall: colour and odour were alike a frame for her beauty and her richness. I can never wholly separate that hour in my memory from the visions of a fever and the burning heat of worse than the African Desert.

Later we sat about the candle-shaded dinner table, a meal where English service faded in the greater glory of French cooking, and I rebelled with Roger at Miss Jencks's curtailment of her charge's appetite.

"Surely, Miss Jencks, this *escarole* is harmless," Roger protested, with a smile at Margarita's empty plate, but when that lady repeated, nodding wisely:

"I assure you, Mr. Bradley, she is better without it," he succumbed meekly, even slavishly, I thought, and shook his head at Margarita's pleading eyes.

In the centre of the table was a graceful silver dish, filled with fruit, and as the attendant *bonne* left the room, Margarita, with a little cooing throaty cry, reached over to it, seized with incredible swiftness two great handfuls of the fruit, and leaping from her seat retreated with her booty to the *salon*. For a second she stood in the doorway, two yellow bananas hugged to her breast among the rich lace, an orange in her elbow, her teeth plunged into a great black Hamburg grape, her eyes two dark blue mutinies.

Roger burst into a Homeric laugh and even Miss Jencks smiled apologetically.

"I suppose we must let her have the fruit," she conceded, "an old friend like Mr. Jerrolds will make allowance—"

"We expect the child in June," said Roger simply, and then something seemed literally to give way in my brain and I clutched the table-cloth as a sharp hard pain darted through my temples. Strange, unbelievable though it may seem, I had never thought of such a thing as this!

FOR HOURS AND HOURS I WALKED, MUTTERING AND CURSING

My face must have excused my brusque departure, my utter inability to eat or drink another mouthful. I muttered something about a rough voyage and my land-legs (I, who never knew the meaning of *mal-de-mer!*) and I know my forehead must have been drawn, for Miss Jencks pressed *sal volatile* upon me solicitously. Roger, manlike, let me get off immediately and alone, as I begged, and once at the bottom of the interminable stairs, I flung myself into a wandering *fiacre*, and drove through the merry, lighted Paris boulevards, a helpless prey to passions black and bitter—to a wicked, seething jealousy such as I had never dreamed possible to a decent man.

That was the deep throat, the large and lovely arm! *That* was the dreamy, full-fed calm, the woman ruminant! God! how the thought tortured and tore at me! I, who had thought myself cured and a philosopher—a kindly philosopher! My first fit of love for her had carried its exaltation with it, but in this grinding, physical rage there was only shame and madness.

I caught, somehow, a train for Calais, I stumbled onto a boat there in a driving rain, and walked the deck in it all night. I travelled blindly to Oxford and tramped through soggy, steaming lanes, through sheets of drizzle, through icy runnels and marshy grass. For hours and hours I walked, muttering and cursing, my teeth chattering in my head, my brain on fire, my feet slushing in my soaking boots. I did not know clearly where I was, I did not know why I was walking nor where, but walk I must, like the convicts on the treadmill. Something laughed horribly in the air just behind me and said like a parrot, over and over again:

"We expect the child in June! We expect the child in June! We expect the child—"

I hit out with my blackthorn stick. "Damn you and your child!" I cried wildly, and fell face forward in a marshy puddle.

CHAPTER XIX

FATE LANDS ME ON THE ROCKS

LONG periods of time passed; days perhaps, perhaps years. Some one, I know, turned with difficulty on his side, so that the puddle did not choke his mouth and nostrils. Some one, by and by, felt something warm and wet and rough against his icy cheek and was grateful for the feeling. Some one was reading to me from a book which described the sensations of a man lifted up and carried in a broken balloon that could only ride a foot from the ground, bumping and jarring horribly, and I was that man, in some strange way, and at the same time I was the illustrations that accompanied the tale. I read the story myself finally, aloud and very shrilly, as that unfortunate man bumped along. After days of this cold journey, the man fell out of the balloon into a warm lake and was delighted with the change, for his very soul was chilled—until he realised, at first dimly, that the water was growing hotter every minute and that the intention was to torture him to death! I was that man, moreover, and I kicked and screamed wildly, though every motion in the boiling water was agony. Just at the point when my breath was failing and my heart slowed, they turned off the water in the lake from a tap, and as it slowly receded, I was safe again, and knew I could fall asleep.

Long I slept, and dreamed inexpressibly, and then I would feel the insidious lapping of the warm lake, rejoice a moment in the comforting heat, then realise with horror that the temperature was rising slowly but surely, and the inferno would begin all over again. Every joint and muscle was red-hot, each burning breath cut me like a knife.

I could not count how many times this happened, but I prayed loudly for the man to die (he had been confirmed, so he had a legal right to pray) and after a long time I began to have hopes that he would, for he discovered a way of drawing his face down under the boiling water and ceasing to breathe. Whenever he did this, a cold, smarting rain drove through the water on his face and forced him to breathe, but he managed to sink deeper and deeper, till at last he felt the throb of the great world on its axle going round, and saw the stars below him, and knew he was nearly free.

"More oxygen!" said a tiny, dry voice far off in infinite space, "more oxygen!"

I grew light and rose to the surface; the stars went out.

"More oxygen!" said the voice again, louder now and close to me. I fought to sink back again but it was useless; I burst up to the surface and breathed the sweet, icy air against my will.

"Now the mustard again, over the heart," said the voice, "and try the brandy."

Something ran like fire through my veins, I opened my eyes, stared into a black, bearded face and said distinctly:

"You nearly lost that man. He heard the thing going round."

Then I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

I was very weak and tired when I woke, but quite composed. That feeling of gentleness and conscious pathos that floods the weak and empty and lately racked body was mine, and I looked pensively at the white, blue-veined hand that lay so lax on the counterpane. What a siege it had been for the poor devil that owned that hand! For I realised that I had been very, very ill indeed.

As I studied the hand it was lifted gently from the counterpane by another and clasped lightly but firmly at the wrist. The arm above this hand was clad in striped blue and white gingham; a full white apron fell just at the limit of my side-

wise vision. I was far too weak to raise my eyes, but it occurred to me that this must be my landlady, for I recognised the footboard of my bed. And yet it was not at all like my room. The armchair was gone, the books were gone, the student lamp was gone, although it was my sitting-room. Then why was the bed there? I frowned impatiently and then the white apron lowered itself, a white collar appeared, and above it a face which was perfectly familiar to me, though I could not attach any name to it.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Jerrolds? a drink, perhaps?" said a clear, competent voice, and I knew at once who she was—the Professor's sister's trained nurse. For one dreadful moment I feared I *was* the Professor's sister—it seemed to me it must be so, that there was no other course open to me, for that was the person Miss Buxton nursed! Then, as she repeated my name quietly, it was as if a veil had been drawn, and I understood everything. My bed had been moved into the study; her bed was in my room. Doubtless the Professor had sent for her.

I felt thirsty, and hungry, too, a fact known to her, apparently, for in a moment she brought me a bowl of delicious broth, which she fed me very neatly by the spoonful. It made another man of me, that broth, and I watched her record it on a formidable chart, devoted to my important affairs, with great interest.

"Have I been ill long?" I asked, and my voice sounded hollow and rather high to my critical sense.

"Two weeks, Mr. Jerrolds," she said promptly, "quite long enough, wasn't it? It has been most interesting: a very pretty case, indeed."

"What was it?"

"Inflammatory rheumatism," she said, with a gratifying absence of doubt or delay (such a relief to a sick person!) "and a great deal of fever, very high. You ran a remarkable temperature, Mr. Jerrolds."

I received this information with the peculiar complacence

of the invalid. It seemed to me to denote marked ability and powers beyond the common, that fever!

"How did I get here?"

She sat in a low chair by the bed and regarded me pleasantly out of the kind, wise, brown eyes.

"I will tell you all about it," she said, "because I am sure you will be easier, but after I am through I want you to try to compose yourself and go off to sleep, because this will be enough talking for now, and I want you to be fresh for the doctor. Do you understand?"

I dropped my eyelids in token of agreement and she went on.

"You remember that you complained of feeling unwell in Paris at Mr. Bradley's house. You probably had quite a temperature then, though you might not have known it. You came directly back to Oxford, but for forty-eight hours no one knew where you were, for the people here supposed you there. Finally, when Mr. Bradley telegraphed, they grew anxious here, and while they were wondering what to do, your dog ran in, acting so strangely that they suspected something and followed him. He led them directly to you and they found you unconscious in a marshy old lane about six miles out from the town. They brought you here in a horse blanket, the Professor sent for me, and we have been taking care of you ever since. Mr. Bradley has been here twice, but you were too ill to see anybody; he saw that everything possible was being done. I shall write him directly that you are on the uphill road now, and that care and patience are all you need.

"Now, take this medicine, Mr. Jerrolds, and repay me for this long story by going directly to sleep."

I took it, lay for a moment in a dreamy wonder, and drifted off. As she had said, the uphill journey had begun.

That afternoon I saw the doctor, a grizzled, kindly man, and it was he who told me what I had already somehow divined—that I owed my life to Harriet Buxton.

"I never saw such nursing," he said frankly; "the woman has a real genius. It was nip and tuck with you, Mr. Jerrolds, and she simply set her teeth and *wouldn't* give up! One can't wonder the American nurses get such prices—they're worth it. Now it's hold hard and cultivate your patience, and get back that two or three stone we lost during the siege, and then good-bye to me!"

But oh, how long it was! Day after day, and night after night, and day after day again I counted the pieces of furniture in the bare, dull room and read faces into the hideous wall-paper and stared into the empty window. The little night-light punctuated the dark; the feeble sunlight struggled through the rain. The few kindly friends who called upon me I could not see; their sympathetic commonplaces were unendurable to my weakened nerves. Had it not been for the return, now and then, of the pains I had suffered in my delirium, mercifully less and less violent, which made the periods of their absence hours of comparative pleasure, I think I should have grown into a hopeless nervous invalid from sheer ennui. I had never been ill that I remember since the days of my childish maladies, and I fretted as only such an one can and must fret under the irksome novelty of pain, weakness and irritation.

How Harriet Buxton bore with my whims and fads and downright rudeness, I cannot tell. When in a fit of contrition I asked her this, she smiled and said that men were generally irritable.

"But I should go mad if I were obliged to humour the caprices of such a bear as I!"

"But you are not a nurse!" she answered quietly.

After ten days of steady convalescence, when I was propped up a little upon my pillows and could feed myself very handily from an ever-increasingly varied *menu*, I asked suddenly if she had heard from Roger lately.

"Yes," she said promptly, "only yesterday. I was waiting till you asked. Before I give you the letter I must tell

you that they are no longer in Paris: they have gone back to America."

"America?" I echoed vaguely, with a half-shocked consciousness that I did not care very much one way or the other where they were.

"Yes, Mr. Bradley came in the day before they sailed, but you were far too ill to see him. At the same time I saw no reason why you should not pull through, and told him so. Mrs. Bradley suddenly expressed a wish to go to her old home, and though for some reasons they did not like to let her begin a sea voyage, for other reasons they wanted to gratify her. She grew quite determined and they decided to allow it. You know she expects her baby in June."

"Yes I know," I said quietly. I remembered the man who had tramped the wet lanes, but to-day he seemed to me a wicked fool, justly punished for his folly. For I knew, though no one had told me, that I should never be the same after this sickness. The very fibres of my soul had been twisted and burned in that white-hot furnace of my delirium, and though Nature might forgive me, she could never forget. Every winter she would take her toll, every damp season she would audit my account, after every exposure or fatigue she would lightly tap some shrinking nerve and whisper "Remember!" A passion whose strength I had never suspected had brought me to this bed, and in this bed that same passion had struggled and shrivelled and died. It was with no mock philosophy that I thought of Margarita. No, the fool knew his folly now. But it was a folly of which I had no need, I verily believe, to feel ashamed. It was not that I was the sort of monk we are told the Devil would be, when he was sick, although my physical weakness may have lain —God knows!—at the root of it, once. No, I had changed. Those who have gone through some such change (and I wonder, sometimes, how many of the passive, unremarkable people I pass on the street, in the fields, in hotels, have gone through such) know how well I knew the truth of this matter

and how little likely I was to deceive myself. I loved her, yes, and shall love her while consciousness remains with me, but it would never again be bitter in my mouth and black in my heart.

"Let me see the letter, please, Miss Buxton," I asked, and she brought it, cutting it for me with her neat accuracy of motion and conservation of energy. I spread the single sheet open and began, but I never read more than one line of that letter.

For it began,

Dear old Jerry:

Ever since Kitchener found you, I have changed—

"Kitch! Kitch!" I cried, overcome with shame and penitence. "Oh, Miss Buxton, do you—does anybody—"

"He is just outside," she said, "I will have him sent up at once. I thought you would want him soon, Mr. Jerrolds. And don't worry—he has never been neglected."

I clutched the sheet in my impatience. Very soon there was a scurrying through the hall, a little gasping snuffle, a small, sharp bark. Then he was on the bed before I saw his good brindled head, almost, and in my arms. I pressed my face against his dear, quivering coat, I surrendered my cheek to his warm, rough tongue, I translated each happy convulsive wriggle.

"Dear old Kitch—good fellow!" I muttered, none too steadily, for I was not strong yet, and he seemed suddenly the only friend on whom I could unreservedly count. Roger had wished to stay with me, I knew, but of course he must go with his wife, and I am glad that I never grudged his absence a moment. For this cause shall a man leave his life-long friend and cleave only to her, and there is no other way. But nothing, nothing could separate Kitch and me!

Miss Buxton left us alone together and we discussed the situation gravely and thoroughly and assured each other that it was only a matter of patience, now, and then, away together!

My spirits rose from the day he came in, and in another week I had advanced to a deep cushioned chair in the window for an hour a day. But it was not a very interesting window, commanding as it did my neighbour's eight-foot garden wall crowned with inhospitable broken glass, and though I appreciate the marvel of the spring as much, I suppose, as most of us, I could never occupy myself very long with natural beauties exclusively, and the trees and the grass could not satisfy my craving for human interest. Now that I was ready for them, all my friends were off for their Easter holiday, and I would not keep the Professor from his spring gardening, though he offered manfully. I have never cared for games, with the single exception of his beloved chess, and my eyes soon tired of reading.

And so at last, in default of something more to my mind, I turned to my nurse and determined to make that silent woman talk. At first it was difficult, for I tried to discover her feelings, her attitude, her history. As to the first two of these I met only failure and the last was pathetically simple. An orphan she was, a bread-winner, an observer. I say it was pathetic, but not that *she* was. Things are changing rapidly with women, I can see that plainly, but twenty years ago a man still felt, ridiculously perhaps, that a kindly, competent woman, however successful in her chosen profession, must needs be, in the very nature of the case, even more kindly and more competent with a child on her lap and an arm about her waist. If in the new doctrine of the Brotherhood of Man it is admitted that we owe each our debt to humanity and posterity, I, for one, have never been able to understand why women should not pay that debt in the coinage most obviously provided them for the purpose. The Brotherhood of Man is a great idea, but surely without the Motherhood of Woman it would grow a little shadowy and impractical. (I speak as a fool!)

And so, I repeat, there was something a little pathetic to me in Harriet Buxton's life, though nothing in the least pathe-

tic in her personality or her actions. Do not turn on me too fiercely, dear ladies, and demand of me with your well-known remorseless logic, what would have become of me if Harriet Buxton had not been beside me in my delirium, with nothing but a clinical thermometer on her knee, and a white apron around her waist. Do not, I beg you, for I shall shock all your strict habits of mind by taking refuge in blind, illogical instinct and reiterating my firm conviction that though I perish, truth is so, and that Nature had a better use for Harriet's lap and waist. She had! (as you used to say in the old emotional era) she had!! *She had!!!*

Well, in despair of eliciting anything romantic from her, I languidly inquired as to her travels. They were not extensive: this was her first "trip abroad." It had been rather a failure, in a way, for although she had been engaged with the understanding that her passage was to be paid both ways, her patient on recovery had decided to spend the summer abroad, and had made it very evident that she did not consider herself any longer responsible for her nurse under these circumstances!

"You should have taken legal advice," I expostulated, "the woman was dishonest. It was shocking, Miss Buxton —surely you could have done something?"

"Perhaps," she admitted, "but I had no friends here and it was hard enough to get my salary, anyway. I could have gone with Mrs. Bradley if I had been free. As it was, I sent them another American nurse I knew of in London, who was glad to go back."

"Why didn't you send her to me and go yourself?" I questioned curiously, "if you want to go so much?"

She looked at me in sincere surprise.

"Why, I had already accepted your case, Mr. Jerrolds," she said.

Alas, Harriet! Why, why were you not teaching your simple code of honour to some sturdy, kilted Harry?

There seemed to be nothing more to be got from Miss

Buxton, and we began to discuss the best winter climate for me, for I understood perfectly that for more years than the doctor cared to impress upon me just now I must avoid damp and chill. We discussed Nassau, Bermuda, Florida, and I mentioned North Carolina. Then Harriet Buxton opened her lips and spoke, and in a few amazed moments it became clear to me that I was in the presence of a fanatic.

For she had been in North Carolina, and this State that for me had spelled only a remarkably curative air and a deplorably illiterate population represented the hope of this woman's life, the ambition of her days and nights, the Macedonia that cried continually in her ears, "Come over and help us!"

For a year she had lived there in the western mountains, giving her duty's worth of hours to a wealthy patient, bargaining for so much free time to devote to that strange, pathetic race of pure-blooded mountaineers, tall, serious, shy Anglo-Saxons, our veritable elder brothers, ignorant appallingly, superstitious incredibly, grateful and generous to a degree. As she talked, rapidly now, with flushing cheeks and kindling eyes, she brought vividly before me these pale and patient people, welcoming her with eager hands, hanging on her wonderful skill, listening like chidden children to her horrified insistence upon long-forgotten decencies and sanitary measures never guessed. As my questions grew her confidence grew with them, and at last she went quickly to her room to return with a thick, black book, which she thrust into my hands.

"It's my diary," she explained. "If you are really interested you may read it. Oh Mr. Jerrolds, to think of the money that goes to Africa and India and slums full of Syrians and Russian Jews, when these Americans—our real kin, you know!—are putting an axe under the bed, with the blade up, to check a hæmorrhage! If they were Zulus," she added, flashing, "some one might do something for them."

I could not keep myself from staring at her: with that flush, those kindling brown eyes and that heaving bosom, my nurse was near to being a handsome woman! And all because the natives of North Carolina had no adequate hospital service. Can you imagine anything more extraordinary? I opened the book curiously; not, of course, that I cared tuppence for the natives, but that I had actually begun to feel interested in Harriet Buxton.

I should never have thought of it again, probably, but for Harriet herself, for now that the magic string had been touched, her heart overflowed to its echoes, and my waking hours were filled with anecdotes touching, brutal or humourous, of her years of joy and labour. Her cottage rent had cost her forty dollars, her clothes nothing, her food had come largely from the grateful people. Over and over again she returned to her ridiculously pitiful calculations. She could live for one hundred dollars a year. She could have the use of a deserted schoolhouse, free. Two hundred dollars would fit up a tiny hospital and lending-closet, with linen, rubber articles, simple sick-room conveniences. If she had five hundred, she would start on that and trust to getting help to go on with. She could stay there a year, then nurse for a year, and go back with the money she had saved.

And so on, and so on, and so on! The floods of North Carolina needs that swept over my helpless head would have drowned a stronger brain than mine. In vain I tried to dam this tide of confidences and hopes and ha'penny economies: it was useless. After a week, during which actual photographs, hideous blue prints, the first advance guard of that flood of amateur photography destined to wash over the world, were brought out for my edification, I rebelled and declared myself cured.

"And to get rid of you," I added crossly, "I am going to give you this," and I handed her her weekly cheque, plus a draft for a hundred pounds. "Take it, and get off to those benighted natives, for heaven's sake!"

HER WEEKLY CHECK, PLUS A DRAFT FOR A HUNDRED POUNDS

She stared at it, at me, at it again, then choked and fled to her room. I felt like a fool.

Later, when I saw what it really meant to the absurd creature, I surreptitiously copied bits of the sordid little diary, and sent them to Roger with a slight account of her, and suggested that he mention this matter to Sarah (who had recently washed her hands of the American negro on the occasion of his having bitterly disappointed her hopes in a brutal race riot) and give that philanthropist's energies a new direction.

I saw Harriet off to her boat, tried in vain to get a half hour of rational conversation on topics unrelated to the western mountains of North Carolina, agreed hastily to all directions as to my health, held Kitch up to be kissed, and went back to my sunny garden-corner, for it was full May now, and my strength was growing with the flowers.

I thought that chapter ended, and was startled and not a little shaken by the thick letter that found me planning my lonely summer early in June. It was from Harriet, a curious, incoherent screed; tiresomely detailed as to her plans, painfully brief as to important issues. She had found a letter from Mr. Bradley awaiting her arrival, she had followed his suggestions and interested Miss Sarah Bradley, his cousin, in her schemes, with the result that the Episcopal organisation had sent a deaconess for a year to work under Harriet's direction and a contribution toward fitting out the little hospital. She had gone to see Roger and thank him personally and found him on an island, with Mrs. Bradley in sudden and acute need of both nurse and physician, the former with a broken leg, the latter gone to New York for the day, as his prospective patient was supposed to be in no immediate need of him. She had hastily set the nurse's leg, telegraphed for the doctor, then devoted herself to Mrs. Bradley, who, though beautifully strong and well, developed sudden complications and gave her quite a little trouble. Things were rather doubtful and hard for five or six hours,

but fortunately the doctor had left full supplies for the occasion and the other nurse was able to give the anæsthetic—she was dragged on a sofa by a deaf and dumb man, who ran five miles to the village just before. It ended triumphantly at dawn and Mrs. Bradley had a lovely little girl—the image of her father. Both were doing well.

Mr. Bradley had overestimated her services, and as she could not dream of accepting the fee he offered her, he had insisted upon paying a salary for three years to a young physician (selected by the doctor, who arrived at noon) who was to give his entire time and strength to the mountain hospital and superintend the affair, now grown into a real institution, since Mr. Elder had volunteered to supply a young fellow from his club, anxious to act as orderly and assistant for the sake of the training, and Mrs. Paynter, a friend of Mr. Bradley's, had managed to get a full dispensary supply at cost prices from connections of hers in the wholesale drug line.

"And it all comes from you, Mr. Jerrolds," the letter ended, "all owing to your wonderful, your noble interest, in this work! You told Mr. Bradley, and though he is not justified in thinking I saved her life, it is perfectly true that those cases give us a great deal of trouble sometimes, and I was very fortunate in having had a great deal of maternity work in the mountains, when I had to act all alone and do rather daring things. But I got the practice there, and so if I did save your friend's life (or the baby's, which is nearer the truth, I confess to you, Mr. Jerrolds!) you have amply rewarded the cause that gave me the training to do what I did!

"Your grateful

"HARRIET BUXTON."

I sat under the glass-topped wall, the letter between my knees, staring at the brick walk bordered with green turf. How strange it was, how incredibly strange! A curious sense

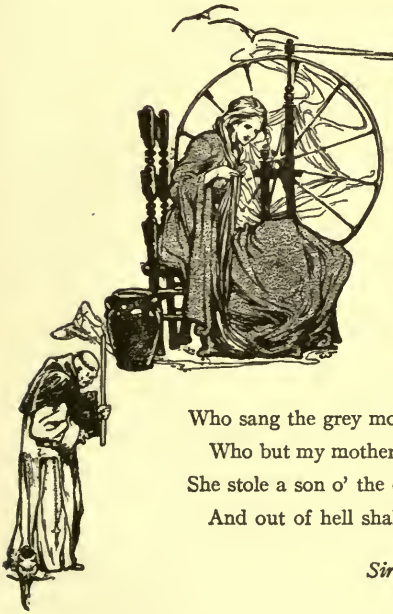
of watchful, relentless destiny grew in me. Truly it slumbered not nor slept! I, who had cursed that child unborn, had reached over seas and helped it into the world! I, who had been jealous of my friend, had sent him a friend indeed! I, who had grudged Margarita husband and child (for in my black, cruel fever I did this) had given her back to both!

I pondered these things long (as if the thread in the tapestry should marvel at its devious windings) and then summoned my landlady.

"Mrs. Drabbit," said I, "I am thinking of going to America."

PART SIX

IN WHICH YOU ARE SHOWN THE RIVER'S VERY SOURCES, FAR UNDERGROUND



And is it I that must sit and spin?
And is it I that my hair must bind?
I hear but the great seas rolling in,
I see but the great gulls sail the wind.

Who sang the grey monk out o' the cell?
Who but my mother that rode the sea!
She stole a son o' the church to hell,
And out of hell shall the church steal me?

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER XX

A GARDEN GLIMPSE OF EDEN

It was mid-August, however, before I reached that part of America that was destined to mean so much to me. A visit to Mrs. Upgrove, my mother's old friend, extended itself beyond my plans, largely because of the pleasant acquaintance I formed there with her son, then Captain, now Major Upgrove, one of the most charming men I have ever encountered. Next to Roger he has become my best friend, incidentally disproving a theory of mine that warm friendships between men are not likely to be formed after thirty. Even as I write this chapter I am looking forward to his visit, and the slim Hawaiian girls are looking forward, too, I promise you, with wonderful, special garlands, and smiles that many a handsome young sailor may jingle his pockets in vain to win!

What is it, that strange, lasting charm that wins every woman-thing of every age and colour? His mother told me that he had it in the cradle, that the nurses were jealous over him and the sweet-shop women put his pennies back into his pockets! Yes, Lona, and yes, Maiti, the silver-haired Major is coming surely, and you shall surely dance! Never mind the wreaths for me, dear hypocrites—they were never woven for bald heads!

It was warm, almost as warm as this languid, creamy beach, the day I clambered, none too agile, over the thwarts of Caliban's boat and made my way up the sandy path to the cottage.

"I'm afraid the fever took it out of you, Jerry," Roger said,

looking hard at me, and I nodded briefly and he gripped my hands a little harder.

"I'm glad you're here," he said.

Through the dear old room we stepped and out the further door, and here a surprise met me. The straggling grass stretch was now a rolling, green-hedged lawn, quartered by home-like brick paths. Two long ells had been added to the house, running at right angles straight out from it at either end, making a charming court of the door yard and doubling the size of the building; the fruit trees had been pruned and tended; an old grape arbour raised and trained into a quaint sort of *pergola*, a strange sight, then, in America; a beautiful old sun-dial drowsed in a tangle of nasturtiums. A delicate, dreamy humming led my eyes to a group of bee-hives (always dear to me because of the *Miel du Chamounix* and our happy, sweet-toothed boyhood!) and near a border of poppies, marigold and hardy mignonette a great hound lay, vigilant beside a large, shallow basket, shaded by a gnarled wistaria clump. The basket was filled with something white, and as we stood in the door, a woman dressed in trailing white, with knots of rich blue here and there, came through a green gate in the side hedge and moved with a rich, swooping step toward the basket. Behind her through the open gate I saw a further lawn white with drying linen, and a quick, pleasant glimpse of a brown, broad woman in an old-world cap, paring fruit under an apple tree, a yellow cat basking at her feet.

The white-clad figure leaned over the basket, her deep-brimmed garden hat completely shading her face, lifted from it a struggling, tiny doll-creature, with a reddish-gold aureole above its rosy face, dandled it a moment in her arms, then sank like a settling gull into the hollow of a low seat-shaped boulder near the wistaria, fumbled a moment at the bosom of her lacy gown, and while I held my breath, before I could turn my eyes, gave it her breast. It pressed its wandering, blind hands into that miraculous, ivory globe (that

pattern of the living world) and through the dense, warm stillness of that garden spot, where the bees' hum was the very music of silence, there sounded, so gradually that I could not tell when the first notes stirred the soundlessness, a curious cooing and gurgling, a sort of fluty chuckle, a rippling, greedy symphony. It was not one voice, for below the cheeping treble of the suckling mite ran a lowing undertone, a murmurous, organ-like music, a sort of maternal fugue, that imitated and dictated at once that formless, elemental melody. Even as we stood riveted to the threshold, the sounds echoed in the air above us, seemed to descend mystically from the very heavens themselves, and as my heart swelled in me, a flock of pigeons swept down from some barnyard eyrie and dropped musically, in a cloud of grey and amethyst, beneath the pear tree. They crooned together there, the woman, the child and the birds, and truly it was not altogether human, that harmony, but like the notes of the pure and healthy animals (or the angels,may be?) that guard this living world from the fate of the frozen and exhausted moon.

"I—I can't get used to it," said Roger abruptly, "it—it seems too much, somehow," and we turned back into the room.

"It's not a bit too much for you, Roger!" I answered heartily (thank God, how heartily!) and we drew deep breaths and welcomed Miss Jencks, in irreproachable white duck—I had almost written white ducks—and talked about my momentous health.

Miss Jencks had abandoned her seaman's comforters for a cooler form of handiwork, suspiciously tiny in shape, but she pursued it relentlessly while we discussed the changes in the cottage; the gardens, the corn and asparagus planned for another season; the ducks quartered near the fresh-water brook; the tiny dairy built for her over the spring; the brick-wall for Roger's pet wall fruit; the piano dragged by oxen from the village; the sail-boat, manned now and

then by our enthusiastic telegrapher: the wondrous size and health of the tiny Mary.

She was called, as one who knew Roger might have expected, for his mother, after the old tradition, too, that gave every eldest daughter of the Bradleys that lovely name. No bitter obstinacy, no unyielding pride of Madam Bradley's could alter in his calm mind the course of his duty, and I never heard a harsh word from him concerning the matter. Margarita cared absolutely nothing about it and never, he told me, expressed the faintest curiosity as to his family or their relations with her.

Soon she was with us, dear and beautiful, with only a tiny lavender shadow under those cloudy eyes—misty just now and a little empty, with that placid emptiness of the nursing mother—to mark the change that my not-to-be-deceived scrutiny soon discovered. We left the sleepy Mary slowly patrolling the brick walks in a pompous perambulator propelled by a motherly English nurse under Miss Jencks's watchful eye, and strolled, in our customary hand-in-hand, to the boat-house, a low, artfully concealed structure, all but hidden under a jagged cliff, and faced wherever necessary with rough cobbled sea-stones sunk in wet cement and hardened there. The right wing of the cottage stood out unavoidably at one point against the sky-line, and Roger, who had developed a surprising gift of architecture and a sort of rough landscape gardening, was planning an extension of the artificial sea-wall to cover this.

He worked at this himself, drenched with sweat, tugging at the stones, while Caliban and a mason from the village set them and threw sand over the wet plaster (the method which we decided must have been adopted by the builder of the cottage), and I, too weak yet to help in this giant's play, criticised the effect from a rowboat outside the lagoon, telegraphing messages by means of a handkerchief code. Often Margarita would come with me, embroidering placidly in the bow of the boat, under her wide hat. She detested sew-

ing, and refused utterly to learn any form of it, to Miss Jencks's sorrow, but had invented a charming fashion of embroidery for herself and worked fitfully at tiny white butterflies in the corner of my cambric handkerchiefs—the one and only form this art of hers ever took. It became a sort of emblem and insignia of her, and Whistler, who began coming to them, I think, the year after that, or the next, made much of this fanciful bond between them. It was she who worked the black butterfly upon the lapel of his evening coat which created such a sensation in Paris one season.

Once while shooting in the Rockies with Upgrove, six or eight years ago, I pulled out an old buckskin tobacco pouch, turned it hopefully inside out in the search for a stray thimbleful, and discovered in a corner of the lining a faded yellow silk butterfly, all unknown to me till then! She must have worked it surreptitiously, like a mischievous, affectionate child; and as I held it in my hands, and stared at the graceful absurd thing, the lonely camp faded before me; the sizzling bacon, the rough shelter, the whistling guide, slipped back into some inconsequential past, and I lay again on the sun-warmed rocks, watching a yellow-headed toddler prying damp pebbles from the beach, to pile them later in her tolerant lap. Oh, Margarita! Oh, the happy days!

CHAPTER XXI

HESTER PRYNNE'S SECRET

I REMEMBER so well the morning of the great discovery. It was one of those damp, rainy, grey days when happy people can afford to realise contentment indoors, and we were a very comfortable group indeed: Margarita sorting music, Roger drawing plans for a new chimney, Miss Jencks shaking a coral rattle for the delectation of the tiny Mary, who lay in her shallow basket under the lee of the great spinning-wheel, and I hugging the fire and watching them. I considered Roger's reforms in the matter of chimneys too thorough-going for the slender frame of the house and told him so.

"You'll batter the thing to pieces," I said, "see here!" and lifting my stick, which I had been poking at the baby after the irrelevant fashion of old bachelor friends, I hit out aimlessly at the side of the fireplace and struck one of the bricks a smart blow on one end. It turned slightly and slipped out of its place, and as I shouted triumphantly and pulled it away, I displaced its neighbour, too, and poked scornfully at a third. This, however, was firm as a rock, as well as all the others near it, and with a little excited suspicion of something to come I put my hand into the small, square chamber and grasped a dusty, oblong box, of tin, from the feel of it.

"Roger!" I gasped, "look here!"

"Well, well," he answered vaguely, "don't pull the place down on us, Jerry, that's all!"

"But Mr. Jerrolds appears to have discovered a secret

hiding-place," Miss Jencks explained succinctly, and then they both stared at me while I drew out from a good arm's reach a tin dispatch box, thick with dust, a foot long and half as wide. I wiped the dust from its surface, and on the cover we read (for Roger and Miss Jencks were at my elbow now, I assure you!) written neatly with some sharp instrument on the black japanned surface, the name *Lockwood Lee Prynne*. With shaking fingers I lifted the lid, which opened readily, then recollecting myself, passed the box to Roger. He glanced curiously at Margarita, but she was absorbed in her music and as lost to us as a contented child. He held the box on his knees, pushed back the lid completely and lifted the top paper of all from the pile. It was badly burned at the edges, as were the packets of letters, the columns clipped from yellowed newspapers, the legal-looking paper with its faded seal and the rough drawings on stained water-colour paper that lay beneath it. It required no highly developed imagination to infer that the contents of the box had been laid on the fire, to be snatched away later.

Miss Jencks and I were frankly on tiptoe with excitement, but old Roger's hand was steady as a rock as he unfolded the stiff yellow parchment and spread before us the marriage certificate of Lockwood Lee Prynne and Maria Teresa—alas, the shape of a fatally hot coal had burned through the rest of the name! We skipped eagerly to the next place of handwriting, the officiating clergyman and the parish—for the form was English—but disappointment waited for us there, too, for the same coal had gone through two thicknesses of the folded paper, and only the date, Jan. 26, 186–, broke the expanse of print. The initials of one witness "H. L." and the Christian name "Bertha," of another, had escaped the coal on the third fold, and that was all.

Roger drew a long breath.

"So it's Prynne, after all," he said quietly, and unfolded the next paper.

This was a few lines of writing in a careful, not-too-well-formed hand, on a leaf torn from an old account-book, to judge from the rulings.

"Sept. 24, 186–. The child was born at four this morning," it said abruptly. "It may not live and she can't possibly. The Italian woman baptised it out of a silver bowl. It is a dreadful thing, for now if it does live it will be Romish, I suppose, but he said to let her have her way, so it had to be. He is nearly crazy. He will kill himself, I think. He knows she must die. It is named after her mother and an outlandish lot of other names for different people. As soon as she is dead the Italian woman is going back to Italy. I shall never leave him."

The leaf was folded here and several lines badly burned. At the bottom of the leaf I could just make out one more line.

"I cannot be sorry she is dying if I burn in hell for it. Hester Prynne."

Roger and I stared at each other, the same thought in our minds. I had imagined many things about the mysterious Hester, but never that she bore that name, as a matter of simple fact. The connection with Caliban had been too much for my overtrained imagination, and heaven knows what baseless theories I had woven around what was at best (or worst) a mere coincidence. For me the scarlet letter had flamed upon what I now know to have been a blameless breast, and in my excited fancy a stormy nature had suffered picturesque remorse where, as a matter of fact, only a deep and patient devotion had endured its unrecorded martyrdom of love unguessed and unreturned. So much for Literature!

Next came two folded half-columns from a newspaper, one containing only that dreadful list of the dead that our mothers read, white-cheeked and dry-eyed, in the war time. Opposite the names of Col. J. Breckenridge Lee and Lieut. J. Breckenridge Lee, Jr., were hasty, blotted crosses. The

other half-column, cut from another and better printed sheet, recorded with a terrible, terse clearness the shocking deaths of the aged Col. J. B. Lee and his son Lieut. J. B. Lee, Jr., of the Confederate Army, at the hand of his son-in-law, Capt. Lockwood Prynne, who was defending an encampment of the Northern forces from a skirmishing party led by the rebel officers. Captain Prynne recognised what he had done as the young lieutenant caught his father in his arms and turned to stagger back, and rushing forward had endeavoured to drag them to safety, receiving a shot himself that shattered his arm, wounding him severely. His recovery was doubtful.

Under our sympathetic eyes the old tragedy lived again, the crisp, cruel lines seemed printed in blood. It needed only the letter that lay beneath to make everything clear.

"Dear Bob," the letter began in the unmistakable neat hand we had read on the top of the box, "I cannot leave you without this word. I cannot explain—my brain is on fire, I think—but try to judge with lenience. Blood-poisoning set in, and my father died in hospital last week. On his dying bed I swore to him that I would never raise my hand against his country. I can't repeat all he said, but he's right, Bob, the South is wrong! Secession is wrong. I brought the body home, but mother could not come to the funeral. She is not at all violent, but she will never be the same again—she didn't know me, Bob. I can't describe how pitiful she is. Uncle James was her twin brother, you know, and they were everything to each other. When we heard of Fort Sumter she was nearly wild, and I promised her with my hand on her Bible never to fight the South. I meant it then—my friends, my home and you all. But I would have got her to release me if I could. But she couldn't release me now, and I would die before I broke that promise, the way she is now. I can't stay here. I couldn't look anybody in the face. I wish I could be shot. I may be, yet. I am going to Italy to see about those silk-worms for the

plantation, that father was interested in. The war can't last much longer and it will be something to do. Mother is well looked after and I can't stay in this country—it's not decent. Can you write to me, Bob? I don't ask much—just write a line. What could I do? Write, for God's sake.

"Lockwood Lee Prynne."

Below this signature, in a different hand, was scrawled:

"I return this letter. I have nothing to say.

"R. S. L."

Alas, alas, the pity of it! The grey moss and the blue forget-me-nots grow together now over many a nameless grave, and Northern youth and Southern maid pull daisy petals beside the sunken cannon ball; but the ancient scar ploughed deep, and old records like this have heat enough in them yet to sear the nerves of us who trembled, maybe, in the womb, when those black lists of the wounded trembled in our mother's hands.

What a hideous thing it is! Can any bugle's screaming cover those anguished cries, or any scarlet stripes soak up the spreading blood? Bullets are merciful, my brothers, beside the cruel holes they pierce in hearts they never touched.

Roger laid the papers and letter reverently to one side, and I, who had been reading over his shoulder, brushed impatiently at my eyes. (I was not entirely a well man yet, remember!) Below the newspaper lay a signed deed, formally conveying a parcel of twenty acres of land, carefully measured and described, to Lockwood Lee Prynne, his heirs and assigns, and all the rest of the legal jargon. This was hardly burned at all.

Of the two slim packets of letters one was badly charred: parts of it fell away in Roger's hands, as he carefully opened it. I cannot transcribe them literally, or even to any great length, for they are too sad, and no good end would be

served by commemorating to what extent that fierce furnace of the Civil War burned away the natural ties of kindred and neighbour and home. Enough that the few remaining members spared out of what must have been a small family cut Margarita's father definitely off from them, in terms no man could have tried with any self-respect to modify. His father, a Northerner, who had identified himself since his Southern marriage with his wife's interests and kinsfolk, had lost touch with his own people, and a few death notices, slipped in among the letters, seemed to point to an almost complete loneliness, which Roger afterward verified. The other packet held two letters only, one in Italian (which language I learned, after a fashion, in order to read it) the other in French. The Italian letter was not only scorched badly, but so blistered—one did not need to ask how—that parts were quite illegible. The writer, a man, evidently, a young man, probably, conveyed in satire so keen, a contempt so bitter, a hatred so remorseless, that it was difficult to believe it a letter from a brother to his sister. Beneath the polished, scornful sentences—vitriol to a tender young heart—surged a tempest of primitive rage that thrust one back into the Renaissance, with its daggers and its smiles. "*Let me tell you, then, once and for all,*" ran one sentence, breaking out fiercely, "*that there is but one country on earth which can shelter you and that villain—his own! There I scorn to put my foot or allow the foot of any member of your family, but let him or his victim leave it—and so long as I live my vengeance shall search you out and wipe out this insult to my house, my country and my church!*" The opening page was missing and the last one was badly burned, so we had absolutely no clue as to the family name.

Roger and I puzzled out enough of it to gather vaguely what the situation must have been, and when we read the second letter it was all clear. This second letter was burned and blistered, too, but its simple, naive repetitions, its tender terror, its brave, affectionate persistence, left little, even in

their fragmentary condition, for us to guess. I will give only a page here and there.

"I have tried for four months not to write, but what you told me last has proved too strong for me and I must. . . . Oh, my dear one, my more than sister in this world, how could you have been permitted this deadly sin? It may be I shall be damned for even this one letter—my only one, for you must not write again. Sister Lisabetta suspects me already, and asked me last week why I should talk with the baker's daughter so secretly? So if she brings another letter I shall tell her to destroy it. Write to me no more."

Ah, now we knew! Strange indeed was the blood that ran in Margarita's blue-veined wrist! No light and fleeting passion had brought her into this world.

". . . . When I remember that it was I who brought you the first letter, I weep for hours. God forgive me, and Our Lady, but I thought it was only some idle nonsense of Sister Dolores—she was always so light, Dolores! They have sent her back to Spain—I know you loved her best! Sister Lisabetta found a bit of your gown caught on the cypress tree. How dared you risk your life so? I swore I knew nothing, nor did I, about what she asked me. The Archbishop came. . . ."

I think I see the little figure slipping from bough to bough under the stars, the odour of all the vineyards is in my nostrils, the splashing of the Convent fountain sounds in my ears!

". . . . I could not sleep at night after that wicked letter of how you love him—how dare you, a vowed nun, write such sinful words? It must be, as they say, wrong to pray for you! Do not try to excuse yourself because your brother devoted you against your will—you were happy till he climbed the tree and saw you! Only Satan can make it so that one wicked look between the eyes should make a man and woman mad for —I will not remember that sinful letter, I will not! Maria, thou art lost!"

And so, even as she and Roger looked and could not look away and never after lost each other's eyes, even so, her mother looked at her lover and looking, lost (or so she thought) her soul! The wheel turns ever, as Alif taught me.

". . . . *What good can such a marriage do? No Catholic could marry you, I am sure. It is no marriage. Your brother wrote you the truth. I do not wonder that you will never read or speak an Italian word again—you have disgraced Italy. But as he says, you are no true Italian—your English mother and her Protestant blood has made this horrible thing possible. Her death was a judgment on you.*"

Oh, these cruel, gentle women! And on these breasts we long to lay our heads!

". . . . *I do not wonder that all his countrymen are against him, and that he must live alone all his days. Even in that wild land blasphemy has its deserts, then. But I cannot help being glad for you that his kinswoman will be your servant, for you are ill fitted to grow maize with the painted savages,* ma plus douce! *But how strange that even a distant relative of one so* comme il faut *should be of a sort to do this!*

"*Alas, I talk as if I were again of the world! If Raoul had not died, I should have been. . . .*"

Here the letter was blotted beyond recognition for a whole, closely written page. It must have been tender here, and one sees the poor Maria fairly kissing it to pieces. I was grateful to the writer.

". . . . *That you should be a mother! And soon! I cannot comprehend it. My head swims. Reverend Mother dreamed of you so, suckling it, with a halo around your head, and she awoke in terror and told Sister Lisabetta, who let it out. The devil put it into her dream, to tempt her, Sister Lisabetta says, for she was always too fond of you. She fasted three days and one heard her groaning in the night—she was as white as paper. Oh, Maria, to feel it at one's breast, tugging there!*

I think I am going mad. Never write again, for I shall never read it, nor know if it is born."

Truly God permits strange things. And yet celibacy is as old as civilisation, and the Will to Live has denied itself since first It was conscious. It cannot be pished and pshawed away, by you or me or another.

"*. . . I will get this to the baker's daughter, and then when I am sure it is gone, I will confess it all, and whatever penance Reverend Mother puts upon me, I shall be only glad. It may be I shall be cut off from Our Blessed Lord longer than I can bear, and then I shall die, but I think I shall be forgiven finally, for something tells me so, and until I gave you the letter, that day near the fountain, I cannot think of any very great sin, can you, Maria? We were always good, we three. But now I am alone, for they will never let Dolores back. She grew so thin—my heart ached for her.*

"*Adieu, adieu—I have tried to hate you, as I ought, but your grey eyes look and look at me in the night, and I feel you tapping my fingers as you used to do—oh, if they will let me I will pray for you every day till I die, and Our Lady will remember that you were always good until he looked at you!*

"*For the last time—*

"*Your Josêphine.*"

Under this letter was hidden a crude little sketch of the cloister-end of some building on a sheet of drawing-paper, and near it, just outside a high wall, a fair outline of a thick cypress. There was nothing else in the box.

Nor did we ever learn another word or syllable of the life of those two in their lonely cottage. Whether Prynne built it himself or hired labourers for the work we never tried to discover. That he buried himself there with the passion of his lonely life, that these flaming lovers, cast off by God and the world, thought both well lost for what they found in each other, who can doubt? The love she inspired in him I can understand, for I have known her daughter; the love

he woke in her, she being what she was, I do not dare to guess. What must that woman's soul have been? What storm of love must have swept her from her cloister-harbour —and on to what rocks, over what eternal depths! Deal gently with her, Church of her betrayal! Forgive her sins, I beg you, for she loved much.

CHAPTER XXII

FATE LAUGHS AND BAITS HER HOOK

I FIND to my surprise that these rambling chapters, intended, in the first place, as a sort of study of Margarita's development under the shock of applied civilisation, have grown rather into a chronicle of family history, a detail of tiny intimate events and memories that must surely disappoint Dr. M——l, at whose urgent instance they were undertaken. Margarita was, indeed, at that time, a fit subject for the thoughtful scientist, and hardly one of her conversations with her friends but would serve as a text for some learned psychological dissertation. But it would have been hard, even for a stony *savant*, to dissect that adorable personality! The points that I had intended to discuss are lost, I find, in her smile; the interest of her relations with the world, as it burst upon her in all its complications and problems, a grown woman, but ignorant as a savage and innocent as a child, is as nothing beside the interest of her relations with us who formed for so long her little special world. However, I cannot offer my scientist nor his distinguished colleague, Professor J——s, a mere tangle of personal reminiscences, so I must try to recall, as accurately as may be, the circumstances of Margarita's introduction to orthodox Christianity. At Miss Jencks's earnest petition Roger, who had grown really attached—as had we all—to the good creature, had finally yielded and allowed her to impart the outline of the New Testament story to her charge. I found her later, a moist handkerchief crumpled in her hand and a tiny worn leather volume on her lap.

"It didn't do, then?" I inquired sympathetically, for her plain, competent face was more disturbed by grief than I had ever seen it.

"Mr. Jerrolds," she demanded seriously, "*do you think she has a soul?* Of course that is wrong," she added hastily, "and I should not say such a thing, but do you know she treats it just like any other story? It means nothing to her. She has no respect for the most sacred things, Mr. Jerrolds!"

"But how could she have, dear Miss Jencks?" I urged gently. "They are not sacred to her, you must remember. She is what you would call a heathen, you know."

Miss Jencks folded her handkerchief thoughtfully.

"Yes, I know," she began, "but think, Mr. Jerrolds, think how gladly, how gratefully the heathen receive the Gospel! I shall never forget how the missionary described it that dined with the Governor-General once. It was in Lent, I remember, and the poor man regretted that it should be, he had eaten fish so steadily in the Islands! It was only necessary for him to tell the simple Gospel story, and it won them directly."

I bowed silently—it was at once the least and the most that I could do.

"And more than that, Mr. Jerrolds," the good woman continued, unburdening herself, clearly, of the results of many days of thought, "look at those wonderful conversions in the slums! Look what this Salvation Army is doing! The Governor-General used to say they were vulgar and that it was all claptrap, but that never seemed to me quite fair. We must have left something undone, we and the Dissenters, Mr. Jerrolds, if this General B——h can reach people we have lost. Isn't that so?"

To this I agreed heartily, and after a moment she went on.

"Why, the roughest, vilest men weep like children when they understand Our Lord's sacrifice, Mr. Jerrolds, and what it did for them, and surely if they, thieves and drunkards and—and worse, can be so touched, Mrs. Bradley. . ."

"Perhaps," I suggested as gently as I could, "it is just because Mrs. Bradley is neither a thief nor a drunkard nor worse, dear Miss Jencks, that she does not feel the necessity for weeping. The emotionalism of the convert is a curious thing, and the sense of sin together with vague memories of that Story, connected with childhood and childhood's innocence, may produce a state of mind responsible for a great deal that we could hardly expect from Mrs. Bradley."

"But we are all sinners, Mr. Jerrolds!" Again I bowed.

"Surely you believe this, Mr. Jerrolds?"

"I should not care for the task of convincing Mrs. Bradley of it," I replied dexterously.

"That was the trouble," she admitted mournfully. "I told her about Adam and Eve, but she said that whatever they had done was no affair of hers, and it could not be wrong to eat apples, anyway, she told me, they were so good for the voice."

I choked a little here.

"She is very literal," I said hastily, "and the apple has symbolised discord in more than one mythology."

"I showed her that beautiful picture of the Crucifixion," Miss Jencks added in a low, troubled voice, "and do you know, Mr. Jerrolds, she refused to look at it or hear about it as soon as she understood! She said it was an ugly story and the picture made her hands cold. She said it could do no good to kill anyone because *she* had done wrong. 'Religion is too bloody, Miss Jencks,' she said. 'I do not think I like it. If I were you I should try to forget it.' Isn't it terrible, Mr. Jerrolds?"

Poor Barbara Jencks! You were an Englishwoman and it was twenty years ago!

"Leave thou thy sister when she prays," says the poet, and with all due respect for his presumable nobility of intention, it is certainly the easiest course to pursue! I left Miss Jencks.

She followed me a little later, however, and told me that she was not entirely without hopes, for Margarita had been greatly taken with the Revelation of St. John the Divine, and had committed to memory whole chapters of it, with incredible rapidity, saying that it would make beautiful music. That very evening she sang it to us, or rather, chanted it, striking chords of inexpressible dignity and beauty on the piano—the pure Gregorian—by way of accompaniment. It was impossible that she could have heard such chords, for she had never attended a church service in her life and such intervals formed no part of her vocal instruction.

Afterward, I read Ecclesiastes to her, and she did the same thing with it, saying that it was the most beautiful thing she had ever heard—she did not care for Shakespeare, by the way, then or later. Tip Elder came to us for a week at that time, and the tears stood in the honest fellow's eyes as Margarita, her head thrown back, her own eyes fixed and sombre, her rich, heart-shaking voice vibrating like a tolling bell, sent out to us in her lovely, clear-cut enunciation the preacher's warning.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not. . . .

Oh, the poetry of it, the ageless beauty!

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken. . . .

Her voice was grave, like a boy's, and yet how rich with subtle promises! It was mellow, like a woman's, but not mellow from bruising—the only way, Mme. M——i told me once. Those poor women!

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

I can see her now . . . there are those, I know, who have guessed my poor secret, and who wonder that I do not "console myself," in the silly phrase of the day. How could I? The twitter of the Hawaiian girls is like that of the beach-birds in my ears, after that golden-ivory voice!

It was in October, I think, that she began to grow restless. Roger was full of plans for the coming winter, and had even gone so far as to all but complete the formalities of renting a house in New York, when she startled us all by inquiring of me when I intended to start for Italy.

"For I am coming with you," she concluded placidly.

"I'm afraid not, *chérie*," said Roger, "I must get to work, you know. You can take lessons in New York, all you want."

"But I do not care to go to New York," she returned quietly. "I like Paris better. I need not nurse the baby, now, and I can sing a great deal. Jerry can take me."

"Mr. Bradley means he must be in New York to continue his professional career, dear Mrs. Bradley," Miss Jencks interposed, "and you must go with him, of course."

"Why?" asked Margarita.

"Because a wife's place is by her husband," said Miss Jencks, after a pause which neither Roger nor I volunteered to fill.

"But why?" Margarita inquired again. "*I* cannot do Roger's pro—professional career!"

"No, my dear, but you can help him greatly in it," Miss Jencks instructed placidly (she was invaluable, was Barbara, when it was a matter of proper platitude, which flowed form her lips with the ease of water from a tap—and she believed it, too!) "a man needs a woman in his home. Her influence—"

"Yes, I know, you have told me that before. But you could stay with Roger, Miss Jencks, and be that influence," said Margarita sweetly, "and I could go with Jerry." Was she impish, or only ingenuous, I wonder? One could never tell.

"How about the baby?" Roger demanded cheerfully.

"I am not going to nurse it any more," said the mother of little Mary quietly. "Madame said I had better stop it now —it will be better for my voice. So it will not need me. Dolledge knows all about taking care of it."

"But, my dear, are you sure it will be good for Mary not to nurse her? She is not six months old, you know," Miss Jencks suggested mildly.

Margarita leaned her round chin into the cup of her hands and gazed thoughtfully at her mentor.

"Then why do you not nurse her, dear Miss Jencks?" she asked.

At this Roger and I left the room hastily. I am unable to state what the late directress of the Governor-General's family said or did!

It was the next day, I remember, that I was called to New York on business connected with my mother's small affairs, and while there I was greatly surprised and not a little amused to receive a telegram from Roger asking me to engage passage for himself, Margarita, Miss Jencks, Dolledge and the baby, on my own boat, if possible, if not, to change my sailing to fit theirs. It is only fair to say that Sears, Bradley and Sears had recently become involved in a complicated lawsuit of international interests and importance, and Roger took some pains to inform me of the very handsome retaining-fee which his knowledge of the workings of English law combined with his proficiency in French quite justified him in accepting in consideration of his giving the greater part of his time to this case—a case almost certain to drag through the winter and require his presence in London and his constant correspondence with Paris.

I received this information as gravely as he offered it, but, to use his own phrase, I reserved my decision as to whether the lack of that same international case would have kept the Bradley ménage in New York.

I stayed in Paris long enough to see Margarita and wee Mary, with their respective guardians, installed comfortably and charmingly in the *Rue Marboeuf*, bade Roger godspeed across the Channel (I could tell from the set of his

shoulders how he would plunge into the work there and how well-earned would be his flying trips Parisward!) and then struck south into Italy, bent on a private errand of my own.

This was nothing less than the tracing, if possible, of Margarita's Italian ancestry, a mission, needless to say, laid upon me by no one, as she knew nothing of this and Roger, apparently, cared less. My reasons for undertaking this search, which I well knew might prove endless and was almost sure to be long, were a little obscure, even to myself, but I now believe them to have sprung principally from my smouldering rage against Sarah Bradley and her ugly insinuations—a subject I have not dwelt upon in this narrative. But I have thought much of it, and I believe now that my vow was registered from the hour of the finding of the dispatch box which solved one-half of the problem.

Sue Paynter was of great assistance to me here, and by judicious questionings of Mother Bradley at the Convent and artless suggestions and allusions when with the other good nuns, to whom she was honestly attached and whom she often visited, she actually procured for me a few vague clues, breathless rumours of those tragedies that rear, now and then, their jagged, warning heads above the smooth pools of cloister life. News travels fast and far among those quiet retreats; some system of mysterious telegraphy links Rome and Quebec and New York, and it was not without the name of a tiny town or two tucked away in my mind and at least three noble families jotted down on the inside cover of my bank-book that I started on my wild-goose chase.

They were, however, quite useless. Two of the noble families had held no greater sinner than a postulant whose ardour had cooled during her novitiate, and the third had paid for what was at best (or worst) a slight indiscretion with a broken spirit and rapidly failing health. It required no great exercise of detective powers to beg the genial little

doctor of each tiny neighbourhood for Italian lessons and I learned more than his language from each. They were veritable hoards of gossip and information of all sorts, and my ever ready and unsuspected note-book held more than verb-contractions and strange vagaries of local idiom.

It was from none of these, however, that I got my first clue, but from the boatman who took me out at sunset for the idle, lovely hour that I love best in Italy and which her name always brings beforem e. Rafaello was a big, burned creature, beautiful as Antinöus and as simple and faithful as a dog. He took a huge delight in teaching me all the quaint terms of his fisher dialect, and many a deep argument have we held, I gazing into the burning sulphur of the clouds, he with mobile features flashing and classic brown fingers never still, while he expounded to me his strange, half pagan, half Christian fatalism. He was of the South, "well toward the Boot Heel, signore," but Love, the master mariner, had driven him out of his course and brought him within fifty miles of Rome to court a fickle beauty of the hills, whose brother had come down for the wood-cutting and was friendly to his suit.

"These marsh people are a poor sort," said Rafaello contemptuously. "Not that I would take a wife from them, God forbid! Here they have great tracts, with buffalo and wild pig—yes, I have seen them myself, rooting through the wild oak—but have they the brains to invite the foreign *signori* to hunt there and earn fortunes by it? No. Have they even strength to cut their own timber? Again, no. They lie and shiver with malaria. Not that they are not a little better now," he admitted, shifting the sail so that we looked toward the headlands of Sardinia, a cloud of lateens drifting like gnats between, "now they are ploughing on the plains, the boats are out, the bullocks are busy, and the wind is putting a little strength into the poor creatures. I swear the best man among them is an old woman I took across in my *felucca* to pleasure my girl's brother—she

tended him once when he chopped through his foot near her hut just on the edge of the hills. Seventy years, or nearly, and tough and wiry yet, and can help neatly with a boat. And money laid by, too, but is she idle? Never. She spins her hemp and weaves osiers into baskets and changes them for goats' hams. That with *polenta* keeps her all winter—and well, too. She is very close. The money, no one knows where it came from."

Thus Rafaello babbled on, steering cleverly and suddenly into one of the vast, unhealthy lagoons that shelter so many of the winged winter visitors of Italy—visitors unrecorded in the hotels, unnoted by the guides, but of greater interest than many tourists.

I, listening idly to him, caught my breath at the flight of flaming, rosy flamingoes that lighted inland, just beyond us, miracles of flower-like beauty.

"From Egypt, *excellenz'*: They are not due till November, but the winter will be cold and they started early. In March they will start back. Why? How should I know? Who sends the wild duck, for that matter? I have seen a half-mile of them at one flight bound for this place. It may be the good God warns them and they go."

"It may be, Rafaello."

"But then, *excellenz'*, does he send the brown water-hens, too, and if so, why not tell them of the young nobleman whom I brought here to shoot only last week? Is it likely God did not know I would bring him? Of course not."

"Perhaps they know, but must go, nevertheless," I ventured, and we were silent and thoughtful. Did they? Did they fly, helpless, to their death, bound by some fatal certainty? Was Alif right, and is it written for us all?

"That young Roman was very generous," Rafaello resumed after a while. "A few more like him, and she will think twice before she refuses again. How I bear it, I can't tell. Pettish she is, certainly, but oh, *signore*, lovely, lovely, like *un angiolin'!* It was from a nobleman—a foreigner,

SHE SPINS HER HEMP AND WEAVES OSIERS INTO BASKETS AND CHANGES THEM FOR GOATS' HAMS

anyway, I suppose it is all one—that old 'Cina got her money, Lippo thinks. He hunted, too, Lippo says, and 'Cina's brother waited on him—he came from these parts. He took her brother north with him afterward, and well he did, too, for not many good Catholics would help him in what he did, and that brother was wicked enough, I suppose. She has little enough religion herself, the old woman—they say her money is for making peace with the church. For when it comes to the last rattle in the throat, *excellenz'*, the boldest is glad of a little help," said Rafaello knowingly.

Night was on us now, and I, well knowing that the air was poisonous for me, could not bring myself to order the boat home. There, while Perseus burned above us and off toward Rome Orion hung steady as a lamp in a shrine, I lost myself in strange, deep thinking, and the marshes were the desert for me and Alif and Rafaello were the same, and I —who was I? What was I?

"The *signore* sleeps?" the man inquired timidly. "I think it is not good to sleep here. Shall we go back?"

"I'm not sleeping, Rafaello, but I suppose we'd better turn. I heard all you said. And what had this wicked foreigner done?"

"He stole a nun out of a holy convent, *excellenz'*," said Rafaello in a low voice.

I felt my heart jump.

"Near here?" I asked, as carelessly as I could.

"Oh, no, far away—I do not know. Nobody knows. It was only 'Cina and his sister came from here. Mother of God, does the *signore* think any woman born hereabouts would have blood enough for that? Look you, *signore*, she climbed down a tree and went with him in the night! A professed nun! Oh, no doubt she is burning now, that one! For no woman need take the veil, that is plain, but once taken, one is as good as married to God himself, and then to take a man after! Oh, no. She

is certainly burning," concluded Rafaello with simple conviction.

"But I thought you said she was alive and made baskets," I said, persistently stupid.

"No, no, the *signore* misunderstands. That is 'Cina, who went with her when they sailed away, being sent for by her brother. The wicked one died, of course, and 'Cina came back with all the money. She nearly died, herself, on the great ship. She ate nothing—not a bite nor a scrap—for four days, she was so sick."

"He was an Englishman, I suppose?"

"No. From the *signore's* country. Not, of course, that they are all like that," Rafaello added politely, "but the truth must be told, he was."

Now it was that my studies in Italian temperament came to my assistance quite as strongly as my knowledge of the rough fisher *patois*. The Italian must not be questioned nor know that anything of interest or importance hangs on his answer. Even as the Oriental he must be handled guilefully, and it was with a guileful yawn that I dismissed the subject.

"It takes an Italian to believe that wild story, Rafaello," I said. "I'm afraid your old 'Cina was teasing Lippo. It all sounds fishy to me. Are we nearly in? I feel cold."

"Indeed no, *signore*, it is the truth. (We shall be in in eight minutes by the *signore's* watch.) 'Cina will never again speak to an Englishman or—or one from the *signore's* country. It is a vow. She would die first. Lippo got a chance for her to stand at her spinning for a crazy Englishman to paint in a picture—good money for it, too!—and she spat in his face. Perhaps the *signore* will believe that?"

Again I yawned.

"Those stories mean nothing," I said, quivering with impatience. "They are but as old legends without names—and dates and places. Old women like 'Cina never can give those names and dates and places. They do not know

if it was ten or twenty or fifty years ago, nor if the man were Austrian or English, or the woman Italian or French or Spanish. Pin them down, and they begin to make excuses. But I don't know why we discuss it—it is not very interesting, even if it is true. Nevertheless, and because you seem offended, Rafaello, and I merely want to show you that I am right, I will cheerfully give a good English sovereign to you or Lippo or the old woman herself, if she can so much as tell you the name of this famous nun and the name of her seducer. You will find she cannot, and then, since I am willing to wager something, you must take me for a fishing-trip free a whole day, in the *felucca*. Is it a bargain?"

His teeth gleamed as he swore it was a bargain and I watched him bustle off from the quay with an excitement I had not felt since my recovery. What would he discover—for that he would discover something I did not doubt. What was Margarita's mother? Some fisher girl, whose father had won an English lady's-maid with his flashing smile? Some little shopkeeper's daughter? Child, perhaps, of some sprig of nobility, caught by a pair of cool, grey English eyes? I did not know, but I felt certain that the old 'Cina did.

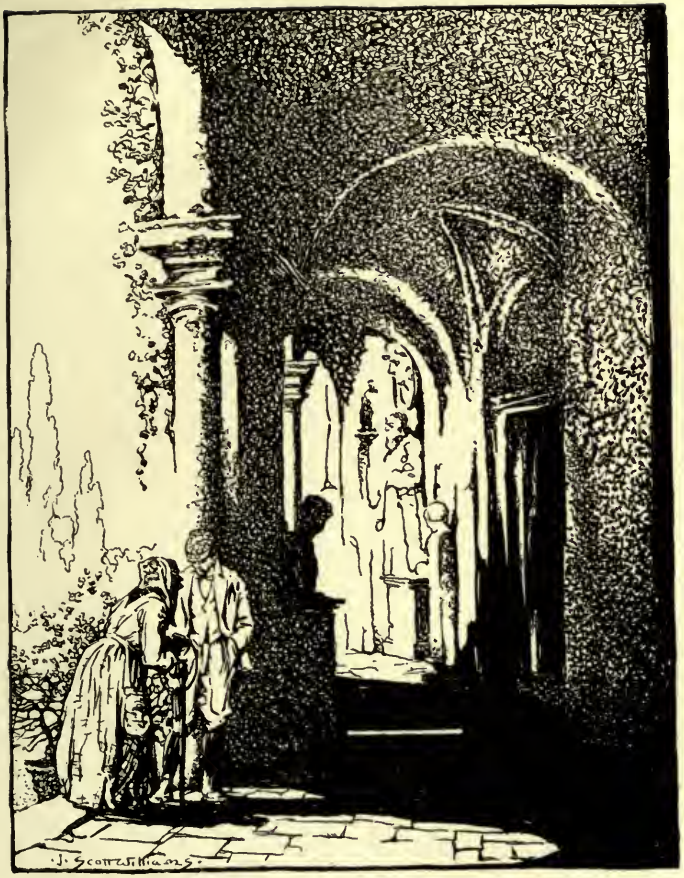
I cannot linger too long over this part of my story, drawn out already far beyond my idle scheme, and enough is said when I tell you that the name brought me by the childishly triumphant Rafaello opened my eyes and pursed my lips into an amazed whistle.

Our little Margarita! Here was something to startle even steady old Roger. Only a few names in Italy are worthy to stand beside the splendid if impoverished House forced by pride to place its unwedded (because undowered) daughter in the convent that needs no *dot*. Obscure in financial realms alone, it required little search to put my finger on the epitaph of that brother of the cruel letter (a Cardinal before his death), on the father's pictured cruel face—he scorned to eat with the mushroom Romanoffs!—on the

carved door-posts where Emperors had entered in the great Italian days, even on the gorgeous sculptured mantel-piece sold by Margarita's grandfather, an impetuous younger brother at the time of his mad marriage with an English beauty, whirled from the stage, whose brightest ornament contemporary record believed she was destined to become, had he not literally carried her, panting, from the scene of her first triumph.

Some idea of the relentless iron hands that tamed that brilliant, baffled creature—and hers was the only strain in Margarita that genius need be called on to vindicate!—I won from the old caretaker, a family retainer, who showed me, on a proper day, over the gloomy, faded glories of the musty palace. She was always heretic at heart, the old gossip mumbled, with furtive glances from my gold piece to the pictured lords above her, as if afraid they would revenge themselves for this tittle-tattle, heretic and light. A servant or a duke, a flower-seller or His Eminence, all was one to her crazy English notions. And the truth—how the mad creature told it! Blurted it out to everyone, so that they had to keep her shut up, finally. And would have her dogs about her—eating like Christians! And no money, when all was said. *Her children?* Four sons, all dead now, and their souls with Christ—one, of the Sacred College. Never a generation without the red hat, thank God. No daughters. *Not so much as one?* Why should there be? Some were spared daughters, when there was no money, and a blessing, too.

What figure had been cut from that group of four youths, cut so that a small hand that grasped a cup-and-ball showed plainly against one brother's sleeve? She did not know—how should she? Perhaps a cousin. It was painted by a famous Englishman and kept because it might bring money some day. *Then why cut it?* How should she know? There were no daughters and the hour was up. Would the *signore* follow her?



THE GLOOMY, FADED GLORIES OF THE MUSTY PALACE

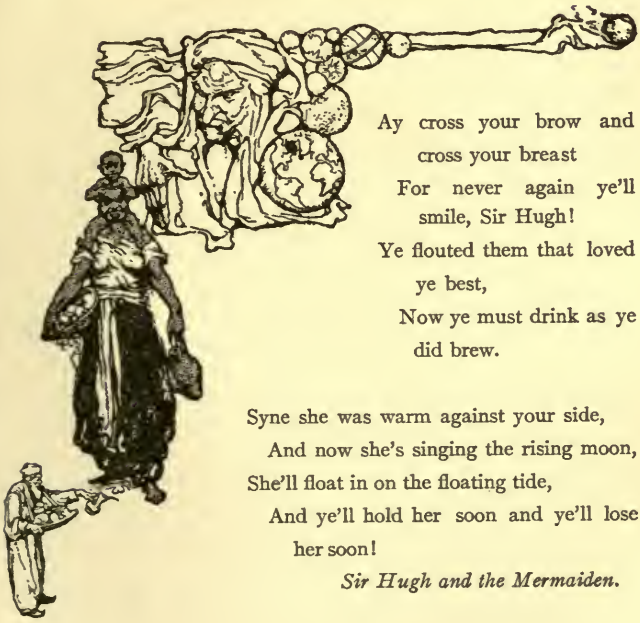
And Sarah was alarmed for the Bradley blood! Sarah feared for the pollution of that sacred fluid derived from English yeomen (at best), filtered through the middle-class expatriates of a nation itself hopelessly middle class beside the pure strain of a race of kings that was old and majestically forgotten ere Romulus was dreamed of! Back, back through those mysterious Etruscans, back to the very gods themselves, an absolutely unbroken line, stretched the forefathers of Margarita. Long before Bethlehem meant more than any other obscure village, long before its Mystic Babe began there his Stations of the Cross and brought to an end at Calvary the sacrifice that sent his agents overseas to civilise the savage Britons and make those middle-class yeomen possible, Margarita's ancestors had forgotten more gods than these agents displaced and had long ceased their own bloody and nameless sacrifices to an elder Jupiter than ever Paul knew. Etruscan galleys swarmed the sea, Etruscan bronze and gold were weaving into lovely lines, Etruscan bowls were lifted to luxurious and lovely lips at sumptuous feasts, in a gorgeous ritual, before the natives of a certain foggy island had advanced to blue-woad decoration! Her people's tombs lie calm and contemptuous under the loose, friable soil of that tragic land that has suffered Roman, Persian and Goth alike (wilt thou ever rise up again, O Mater Dolorosa? Is the circle nearly complete? Would that I might see thee in the rising!) they lie, too, under the angular and reclining forms of many a British spinster tourist, panoplied in Baedeker and stout-soled boots, large of tooth and long of limb, eating her sandwiches over the cool and placid vaults where the stone seats and biers, the black and red pottery, the inimitable golden jewelry, the casques and shields of gold, the ivory and enamel, the amber and the amulets, lie waiting the inevitable Teutonic antiquary. The very ashes of the great Lucomo prince and chieftain lying below this worthy if somewhat unseductive female would fade in horror away into the air, if one of his gods,

Vertumnus, perhaps, or one of the blessed Dioscuri, should offer him such a companion or hint to him that the creature was of the same species as the round-breasted lovelinesses that sport upon the frescoes of his tomb, among the lotus flowers.

Poor Sarah—I can forgive her when I consider the pathos of her.

PART SEVEN

IN WHICH THE RIVER LEAPS A SUDDEN CLIFF AND BECOMES A CATARACT



Ay cross your brow and
cross your breast
For never again ye'll
smile, Sir Hugh!
Ye flouted them that loved
ye best,
Now ye must drink as ye
did brew.

Syne she was warm against your side,
And now she's singing the rising moon,
She'll float in on the floating tide,
And ye'll hold her soon and ye'll lose
her soon!

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER XXIII

FATE SPREADS HER NET

[From Sue Paynter]

Paris, March 4th, 188—

Jerry Dear:

Frederick died here a week ago. His heart, you know, was never very good, and the strain of his last concerts was too much for him. They were very successful, and just before I came over, the poor fellow had sent me—in one of his periodical fits of reform, *Dieu merci!*—some beautiful jewels, chains, aigrettes and a gorgeous diamond collar, begging me to sell them, but on no account to wear them, as if I would! I sold them pretty well—it's all for the babies, you know. Poor Frederick—I'm not sure his reforms were not the hardest to bear!

He has been for so long so less than nothing to me that the sense of freedom is startling. I'm glad I came as soon as I heard he was sinking—it was not so very sudden. I was with him to the last, and the strangest people came to see him—it was tragically funny. He seemed just like a poor, disreputable brother to me, and nothing mattered, really, except to get him what little comfort one could.

I brought the children over, and I think we shall stay here indefinitely. I have a nice little *appartement* not too far from the Bradleys, though, of course, I couldn't afford to live there! and such a dear, sensible bonne (*à tout faire*, of course) who gets the children into the park every day for me when I'm busy. For I am very seriously busy, and how, do you think? I wrote a long, gossippy letter to Alice Carter who loves *chiffons*, poor soul, though Madam Bradley

doesn't give her many, telling her what was being worn and where, and how, and gave her a little account of a fashionable *fête* that a friend of mine had described to me, and the dear creature actually took the trouble of copying it, omitting personalities, of course, and showing it to a friend of Walter's, an amazing young man who is starting some woman's magazine with a phenomenal circulation, already. He offered her a really good price for it and said if I would do the same kind of letter every month, he would pay one hundred dollars for each one—five hundred *francs!* Of course I accepted, and now I spend two days a week in the shops, getting ideas and making sketches. You see I am a business woman, really, Jerry. I have always believed that plenty of women would do better at their husband's business, and let them hire housekeepers or attend to the house themselves! Look at the French women!

It seems so good to be here—it always agreed with me, *la belle France*, and the children seem well, too—for them. Little Susy really has some colour. They are especially fond of the *Parc Monceau*, and this charming out-of-door life that is so easy here will do wonders for them, I'm sure. That east wind of Boston—ugh, how I loathe it!

I feel so busy and so self-respecting—independence agrees with me. You see, with my few hundreds from father, and these letters, and the little income Roger got for me, with the principal put away for the children, I shall do very well indeed and owe "nothing to nobody." And when Susy gets old enough, I'm going to have her taught something—trade or profession, *n'importe!*—that will make her as independent as I am to-day. I think it is criminal not to. Then she needn't marry unless she wants to.

I wonder if you realise how many women marry to get away from home? Few men do, I imagine. It's not particularly flattering to you, *messieurs*, but it's the truth. I had four sisters, and I know!

You have heard, I suppose, that Margarita is actually in training for the opera? It was very exciting—Mme. M——i is really at the bottom of it, I think, though everybody agrees with her to this extent: the child really has extraordinary talent, and with her face and figure will be sure of success,

one would think. Of course her voice is not phenomenal—I doubt if it is big enough for the New York opera house. How Frederick used to rail at that building! They wanted him to play there once, you know, at some big benefit. He always said no respectable human voice could be judged there—it seems the acoustics is wrong. But it is an exceptionally fine voice, nevertheless, and so pure and unspoiled. She had nothing to unlearn, literally, and her acting, Madame says, is superb. She can memorise anything, and in such a short time!

But for a Bradley! Madame is furious that she is married. There are plenty to have babies and live in America, she says, without her little Marguerite! *M. le mari* does not appreciate what a jewel he wishes to shut up, she says—but I am not so sure of that! Whether he is really going to let her or is only humouring her, I don't know. It is rather an embarrassing situation, *au fond*, because you know what she is—calm, lovely, enchanting—what you will, but absolutely immovable! Reasoning has no effect upon her, and then, to tell the truth, she has reasons of her own. Her desire for this is very strong, and her affection for Roger is not strong enough, apparently, to make her sacrifice herself. Do you think she has any soul, really? I mean, what we understand by that—something that takes more than two years of ordinary life to grow. Passionate, yes. Intelligent, yes. But a real soul? *Je m' en doute.*

"Of course I love Roger, Sue," she said to me, "but why should I not do what I want to just because I love him? I can love him and sing, too."

Then Miss Jencks advances to the fray, with pleasant platitudes about giving up what we like for those we love.

"But Roger loves me, too," says *la Margarita*—"why does he not give up what *he* likes because he loves me?"

Tableau! *Que faire alors?*

It is really rather complicated, I think, Jerry, though you will probably not agree with me, when I explain what I mean. I have done a great deal of thinking in the years since my marriage—I have been forced to. Things which would never have occurred to me, never come into my horizon if, for instance, I had married Roger; things which

would never, I can see, be likely to come into the horizon of the happily (and prosperously) married, have come to me and I have been obliged, in my poor way, to philosophise over them.

Have you ever read Ibsen's play, the "Doll's House"? I don't think it has been acted in America, and probably won't be, unless, perhaps, in Boston. But get it and read it. It is to show that a woman is a personality, aside from her family relations, and must live her life, finally, herself. At least, so I understand it. It is to be acted in London soon, and I am going to try to see it—the theatre seems to mean so much more, this side the water! One really takes it seriously, somehow, along with the other arts. But then, there is no duty on art here!

Will you tell me, Jerry, why, if Margarita really is an artist and has a great gift, she should not use it? It may not be what would best please her husband (and you know, Jerry, I would cut off my hand for Roger! But I must say what I think) but if she sees a career open to her of fame, money and satisfaction, why should the fact of her marriage prevent it? As far as fame goes, she could be better known than Roger; as far as money goes, she could almost certainly earn more than he can; as far as what *Nora*, in the play I spoke of, calls "her duties towards herself," she could surely develop more fully. That is, if it is necessary for a woman to develop herself fully in any but the physical sense—and isn't it?

It is all very perplexing and I do so wish it had happened to any one but Roger! He is much hurt, I know, though he conceals it well, of course, in his quiet, steadfast sort of way. What a man he is! He would never be willing, I am sure, to go back to his profession in New York and leave Margarita alone in Europe, exposed to all the temptations and scandal and dangers that seem almost inevitable in the life she is preparing for. They might as well be completely and legally separated, in that case. He has money enough without practising law, of course, but he would never be idle—he loves his work—and as for hanging about as her business manager—I wish you could have seen his face when Madame suggested it! I explained to her it was not precisely

the sort of thing his family were accustomed to do. She can't understand it, of course—she has the French idea of a lawyer. When I told her that Mr. Bradley was really *vrai propriétaire* and well-to-do aside from his practice, she had more respect for him.

"Then he will not need to occupy himself," she said triumphantly, "and all the better. Let him rent an estate and live *en gentilhomme!*"

She has promised to go back to America for the summer for two months—she can learn her *rôles* there, she says, and Roger wants to go. *Eh bien!* We shall have to wait.

The child is beautiful—so strong and well, and so ridiculously the image of Roger. She is trying to stand now—think of it! My poor little rats were two years old before they could. *A vous toujours,*

SUE.

[FROM MY ATTORNEYS]

SEARS, BRADLEY AND SEARS,
Attorneys and Counsellors-at-Law.
Cable Address, Valleshta.
2— COURT STREET, BOSTON, MASS.
March 10th, 188—

WINFRED JERROLDS, Esq.,
Cf., Coutts Bros.,
Cairo, Egypt.

DEAR SIR:

Pursuant to our letters to you of six weeks ago, we had our Mr. James go to the North Carolina plantation to investigate and report on the property. He was almost at once approached with offers to buy the property on terms which surprised him. He communicated with us and we took the responsibility of sending one of our best mining experts to look over the ground. We found that Pittsburg men had been making heavy purchases of land a few miles west across the range and had also been buying tracts adjacent to your lands both north and south; they had also had a party of engineers all over your lands under the guise of a fishing party.

The expert, Mr. Minton, reported that he found heavy outcroppings of coal on both sides of the valley, of excellent steaming quality. The veins apparently extend through your lands into the higher lands north and south of yours. West of you but a few miles these Pittsburg people have acquired large bodies of iron ore. But the most important fact of all is that the valley is the most practical route for a railroad across the range west of you, from the coast to the iron lands already mentioned, for many miles in either direction.

We have been negotiating for three weeks with these Pittsburg people and they have finally made us an offer which we enclose. Briefly, it amounts to $300,000 in five per cent. mortgage bonds, $250,000 in stock (this of problematic value) and a royalty of ten cents per ton on all coal mined on your lands, with an agreement to mine at least 50,000 tons annually until your coal measures are practically exhausted.

In view of your unwillingness to come here and yourself engineer a rival development company, not to speak of the difficulty of enlisting adequate capital in the face of the purchases already made by our Pittsburg friends, we think you cannot do better than accept this offer. Whether we can get as good an one later is doubtful. We have promised an answer by cable from you within three days of your receipt of this letter.

Congratulating you on these most fortunate discoveries, we remain, Yours very respectfully,

SEARS, BRADLEY AND SEARS.

[FROM TIP ELDER]

UNIVERSITY CLUB, NEW YORK,
March 20th, 188—

DEAR JERRY:

I needn't say how hearty my congratulations are on your good luck, need I? What a hit that was! And what a fine use you are making of it, too! Of course I'll help all I can. I must hurry to catch this mail-boat, so I will just cut short

and merely say that Latham and Waite, of Union Square, seem to have put in the best bid for the work and I have told them to send you the detailed budget and contracts as soon as they can get them ready. They have connections with a big brick-yard in Tennessee and say that they can put you up a very good little hospital, three wards, operating-room, six private rooms, diet kitchen, dispensary, nurses' dormitory and suite for superintendent, including one elevator, for close under $65,000, on very good terms of payment. This will include all fittings (hardware, etc.) and two fine, large piazzas, with arrangements for sun parlour, if desired. Also four bathrooms. Miss Buxton has selected the site, as I suppose she has written you, and Miss Bradley has secured another deaconess-nurse for the permanent staff. Young Collier has done marvellously well down there, and the generous endowment you offer will take care of two more boys, Miss Buxton says. Dr. McGee says that Collier has a real gift for surgery—I think I have got a scholarship for him at Johns Hopkins, next year.

What a fine little woman that nurse is! She can't speak of you without her eyes filling with tears. I teased her a little by saying that if she had not begged you for the use of that deserted farm-house on your land for a convalescent home, you would never have learned about the coal and probably sold the land for a song, so the credit was really hers—you ought to have seen the sparks in her eyes!

"You have really made him a rich man," I told her.

"I wish I could," she said very soberly, "but it's not money Mr. Jerrolds needs."

What do you suppose she meant? Anyhow, you've got it, old fellow, whether you need it or not, haven't you?

The hundred you sent me (you knew I didn't need any "fee") has gone into fitting up my club gymnasium. It went a good way, too. I miss Mrs. Paynter's suggestions—she is a good business-woman. What a release, that blackguard's death! Strong words for a minister, perhaps you think, but I tell you, my blood boils when I think what she endured. I gave up my grandfather's hell, long ago, but some men make you long to believe in purgatory!

I heard in a round-about way from Roger's brother-in-law

Carter (Yale '8—, isn't he?) that Mrs. Bradley was going on the stage. I was afraid of it last summer.

Miss Bradley is a good woman, but not much like Roger, is she? Queer, how people get into the same family.

Hoping the rheumatism is all right now, and that you'll make use of me, in any way you can, I am

Yours faithfully,
TYLER FESSENDEN ELDER.

[FROM ROGER'S SISTER]

NEWTON, MASS.,
April 2nd, 188—

DEAR JERRY:

I can't resist, in spite of your warning, letting you know how deeply we appreciate your generous offer for the children. You know, of course, that we never felt the slightest claim. It would not have been so much, anyway, if it had been divided, and father always felt that people had a right to leave their money as they chose, if they had any rights in it at all, he said. I believe he thought it ought to go to the State, or something. He and Mr. C—l S—z used to talk about it evenings, I remember.

But to provide so generously for them in your will—it was truly kind and Walter feels it very much. I hope it will be long before they get it, Jerry. Of course Roger will have a son some day and then you will be giving it to Roger Bradley, as you say, and it won't have been out of the family really—you were just like one of us for so many years. And dearer to Uncle Win than any of us, I am sure.

With deepest gratitude again from Walter and myself, and hopes that you are quite well now,

Yours always,
ALICE BRADLEY CARTER.

CHAPTER XXIV

OUR SECOND SUMMER IN EDEN

THAT winter had been my introduction to Egypt. I have never since let more than three winters, at most, go by without revisiting the strange, haunted place; next to Nippon the fairy country it is dearest to me of all the warm corners of the earth—and I have dragged my twinging, tortured muscles to them all. Only last winter—for many months have passed since I copied those last letters into my manuscript, and I paid dear for a last attempt at a February in New York—I strolled through Cairo streets, drew gratefully into my nostrils the extraordinary mixture of odours that differentiates Cairo from every place in the world (how the great cities are stamped indelibly each with her own nameless atmosphere, by the way! And yet not quite nameless, for London's is based on street mud and flower-trays, Rome is garlic and incense, Paris is watered asphalt, New York is untended horses and tobacco-smoke, and Tokyo is rice straw) and as I strolled, a strange thing happened to me.

I was passing by a street-seller of scarabs, a treacherous-looking wretch, whose rolling eyes glanced covetously at the scarab—better than any of his—that I wore at my scarf-knot, and pressed against him to avoid a great black with a tray of brass bowls and platters on his head. Just ahead of me a lemonade-merchant uttered his wailing, minor cry, and as the crowd jostled in the narrow, dirty lane, my eye was caught by a coffee-coloured woman, a big Juno, with flashing teeth and a neck like a bronze tower. Across her shoulders sat a naked baby who held his balance by his

two chubby hands buried in her thick black hair, one leg dropping over each splendid breast. She caught my eye, and laughed outright as the child kicked out with one fat foot and struck the brasses on the tray so that it tipped and swayed dangerously.

I stood there, lost in a maze of Cairo streets, and the babel of the shrieking, blue-clad donkey-boys was the scream of gulls to my ears and the sun on the swaying brass platters was the reflection of a polished sun-dial. The turquoises on the scarab-seller's tray were turquoises about Margarita's waist, the lemonade was borne by Caliban, and the child that rode astride those strong shoulders had hair like corn-silk burned in the sun and eyes as blue as any turquoise! For so had she held her baby, walking with that free, noble stride, and so she had laughed and met my eyes, and so the child had clutched her hair, in the summer just passed.

So vivid was the impression that I stood, as I say, in a maze, and the scarab-seller and he of the brass tray cursed me heartily as they struggled for balance in the pushing, screaming, reeking crowd. How meaningless that phrase, "real life!" Years and years of actual happenings in my life have been less real than those seconds in the Cairo streets, when down the alley-ways of sound and sight, across the intricate network of that spongy, grey tissue in my skull, this tiny, deathless, unimportant memory led my soul away from the present and left me, an unconscious, stupid, mechanical toy, to block the Cairo traffic, while I—the real I—lived far away. Truly the poets and the children are our only realists, and Time and Space have fooled the rest of us unmercifully.

I find that trivial recollections of this sort interest me far more in the recording than my sensations as a wealthy man. These last were, indeed, strikingly few. Beyond the pleasure of buying old Jeanne a Cashmere shawl, the hidden ambition of her life, and giving orders for Harriet's hospital (for I seemed to have brought the natives of North Carolina

down on my shoulders, somehow—and that without the faintest interest in them!) my amazing good fortune made less impression upon me, as a matter of fact, than Uncle Winthrop's first legacy. What was there for me to do with it? Roger refused to touch a penny; my mother, beyond a little increase in her charity fund and a pony phæton, was merely bewildered when asked to make any suggestions, and would have handed purses to every tramp in New England if she had been given the means; my father's people were well-to-do, and the conferring of benefactions has always been difficult for me, anyway. The only way for me would be to drop gold-pieces on needy thresholds by night and run away—a startling occupation for a rheumatic bachelor, surely! I do not know how to receive thanks—they embarrass me frightfully. To stand smugly with a philanthropic smile while the widow and the orphan weep around my knees, is something I should be forever unable to achieve. Harriet's hospital was not a charity—it was something to keep the ridiculous creature busy—her yacht, her picture gallery, her stud-farm, if you will.

As for me, I had none of these tastes. I bought the one or two pictures I had always wanted, that were within my means (most of them weren't within anybody's!) I put a piano in my new rooms, laid in a little wine for my appreciative friends, bespoke the unshared services of Hodgson, who was unfortunately necessary to me now that every sudden damp day crippled my right shoulder (he came to me wearing one of my old suits, by the way) and put a new steam-launch into Roger's concealed boat-house. I presented Margarita with another and a larger gift of pearls, it is true, but without one-tenth of the choking excitement with which I had clasped that first single one upon her neck.

The lady herself, however, balanced this equation; she was greatly delighted, and if she had not, perhaps, perfectly appreciated the first offering, more than atoned by her rapturous recognition of the second.

"And how they must have cost!" she cried. "Jerry, you are too generous—but I do love them!"

To think of Margarita's estimating the value of a gift!

We had famous talks that August, while Roger sweated at his new task—making an island for us, no less!—and *petite Marie* gathered shells and buried them in tiny, wave-washed graves.

She took to reading that summer, and I read *Pendennis* and *David Copperfield* aloud and she embroidered great grey butterflies all over her grey gown for *Faust*, and the big brindled hound slept at our feet near the bee-hives.

"Which do you like best?" I asked her curiously.

"Oh, the one about Mr. Pendennis is the prettiest," she answered promptly, "I should have liked the man that made that book the best. But Mr. Dickens knows about more things. He makes more different kinds of people."

"Thackeray has been called cynical," I suggested.

"What is that, Jerry?"

I explained, and she shook her head.

"O no, that is not cynical. That is the way things are, Jerry. Only everybody does not say so."

"Do you think," I asked, "that people really talk the way Mr. Micawber talks? I never heard anybody. And certainly nobody ever talked like his wife."

"No," she said thoughtfully, "I never did, either. But there must be a good many people *like* them, Jerry, I am sure. And if they knew as many long words as Mr. Dickens, that is the way they *would* talk, I think."

I have never heard a better criticism of the literary giant of the nineteenth century.

She never made the slightest secret of her affection for me nor of our thorough comprehension of each other and our similarity of tastes. Quiet always, or almost always, with Roger, with me she chattered like a bird, and I could give her opinion on many matters of which he knew nothing.

"Jerry and I like Botticelli and caviar sandwiches and

street songs and Egypt, and Roger does not," she told Clarence King once—I can hear him roar now.

"I can talk better to you than to Roger," she confided to me one day on the rocks; "if it were the custom to have two husbands, Jerry, I should like you for the other—but it is not," she added mournfully.

I agreed to this with regret and she went on thoughtfully.

"You see, Roger would not like it, even if it *was* the custom, so I could not, anyway."

"That is very amiable of you," I said.

"It is strange how I always think of what he would like," she added, with perfect sincerity, I am sure. "One day when he would not let me have any more bread—it was so bad for my voice, you know—I got very angry and spoke crossly to him, but still he would not, and I told him that since he did not want me to sing he had better let me spoil my voice, if I wanted to—and you would think he would, would you not, Jerry?"

"No," I answered soberly, "no, Margarita, I wouldn't. He knew you really wanted your voice more than the bread, so he gave you what you wanted."

"Yes. But that day I was so angry, I planned how much more free I should be if he were to die—was it not terrible, Jerry?—and then I got so interested I could not stop, and I made a dying sickness for him like my father's, and Miss Buxton came, and then I got a black frock like Hester when my father died, and then we—you and I—made a grave for him with my father's grave on the little point, and then (this was all in my mind, you see, Jerry) I was so sad I cried and cried—as I do in *Marguerite*, all over my cheeks, and then, what do you think?"

"Heavens, child, what can I think? I don't know," I said unsteadily, revolving God knows what of possibilities in my presumptuous and selfish heart.

"Why," she said simply, "I felt so badly that I went to Roger (in my mind) to tell him about it and show him the

beautiful grave we had made and my black frock (I had a little pointed bonnet with white under the front, like the widows in Paris) and suddenly I remembered that I could not show him—he would be dead! You see that would have been very bad, for I had been planning all the time that he would be there to—to—well, *that he would be there!* You see what I mean, don't you, Jerry? Roger has to be there."

"Yes, I see," I said, very low, filled with sickening shame, "he has to be there, my dear."

"And so I stopped all that dying sickness directly," she continued comfortably, "because it was too silly, if I could not tell him about it afterwards, you see.

"And yet he was very cross to me about the bread," she burst out childishly. "Why do I think he has to be there, Jerry? He cannot talk to me nearly so nicely as you can—he does not understand. Why must he be there?"

I choked and laughed at once.

"Because you love him, you silly Margarita!" I declared.

"That must be it," she agreed, with a serious, long look at me out of those deep-sea coloured eyes.

Ah, me!

How we worked at that canal! Caliban and two swarthy Italians and Roger and I—for I marked out the course of it in an artfully natural curve and put in the stakes. There were eighty-odd feet across the part of the peninsula we selected, and it bade fair to wear us all out and last forever, till I seized the occasion of a business trip that took Roger away for four days and hired a great gang of labourers who finished it all up, so that he walked into his island home across a foot-bridge, to his great and boyish delight. What a big boy he was, after all! Not that I did not share his pleasure in the Island: it gave me a delicious feeling of security and distance from the rest of the world. With the help of the gang I had been able to widen our channel considerably and it took a very respectable bridge indeed to span the gap. We had made plans for a regular drawbridge, but later

we abandoned them, and chopped even the old one down. The water has washed and washed and worn away since, on the island side, and now one must be bent upon a swim indeed who cares to venture among the jagged ledges and mill-races that my blasting made.

We piped our spring too—a beauty—up through the dairy cellar to the kitchen, and Caliban was saved many a weary trip. Some years afterward I took my chance during another absence of the lord of the Island, and a hurried and astonished set of plumbers installed a luxurious bathroom in either ell of the cottage—a surprise for his birthday. Profiting by a winter in Bermuda, I copied their roof reservoirs, allowing one to each ell, sanded without, whitewashed within, an architectural measure which made the skyline even more rocky and wild, in appearance, from the water. Before we left, that autumn, we planted fifty evergreens, pines, hemlocks and spruces, in a broad belt just opposite the Island, masking it completely from the shore, and hardly a year passed after that without thickening and lengthening that concealing wall. Oh, we guarded our jewel, I can tell you!

It was that summer, I think, that Whistler came to us and drew that series of sepia sketches that frames the big fireplace. They are on the plaster itself—a sort of exquisite fresco—and Venice sails, Holland wind-mills and London docks cluster round the faded bricks with an indescribably fascinating effect. At my urgent request I was allowed to protect them with thin tiles of glass riveted through the corners into the plaster: how the collectors' mouths water at the sight of them!

Stevenson came a few years later: all the quaint comforts and intimate beauties hidden away behind the boulders plainly caught his elfish, childlike fancy—it was he who made the little grotto beyond the asparagus bed, lined the pool in it with unusual shells and coloured pebbles, fitted odd bits of looking-glass here and there, and wrote a poem on a smooth stone at the door for little Mary, to whom he dedicated it.

"The purple pool of mussel shells,
All full of salty ocean smells,
The coral branches in the wall—
And you the mermaid queen of all . . . "

She used to recite it all very charmingly. Roger never wanted it printed in the *Child's Garden of Verses*, where it properly belongs—one of the best of them, in my opinion.

He and Margarita talked together by the hour and I have seen his dog-like brown eyes fixed on her an hour at a time. I asked him once if he intended to "put her in a story"—the quaint query of the layman, so strangely irritating to the book-man—and he shook his loose-locked head slowly.

"They say I can't do women, you know," he said, "and nobody would believe her if I put her in, she's too artistically effective."

And here am I doing it! Fools rush in . . .

It may seem odd that Roger and I should not discuss the opera business, but we didn't. That it hurt him I knew, for I knew Roger. Anglo-Saxon to the backbone, the position which his wife as a successful operatic star must put him in could be nothing but highly distasteful to him. It is one thing to snatch your wife from the stage, as Margarita's noble grandfather had done, and enjoy her in your home; it is quite another to see her snatched from your home to that stage, after you have married her. But I have never known a juster man, and though he talked little of the "rights" of women, and then in a brief, blunt fashion that would have exasperated the fast-emerging sex most terribly, he nevertheless respected the rights of every human creature most scrupulously. Though he had the private appreciation of the unmistakable good points of the harem-seclusion shared by every healthy male, he would never have shut Margarita into a New York house or a honeymoon-island against her will, and I think he was too proud to reason with her on the only lines open to him. I think, too, that his quiet refusal to take any strong measures may have been based,

partly, on the full appreciation of the risk he ran in marrying such a bundle of possibilities as Margarita. One of the greatest passions that ever (I firmly believe) mated two people had whirled him out of the conventional current of his life, and because it had, in its course, brought him into the rapids, he was enough of a man to set his teeth and take it quietly, knowing that when he left the calm, green-bordered stream for the adventure of flood tide, he did it with his eyes open—a grown man. Or so, at least, I take it that he reasoned: he acted as if he had.

Again, it would have been difficult for me to discuss the matter for another reason than Roger's perfectly characteristic reserve. Much as I regretted that this issue should have arisen in Roger's household, like Sue Paynter I had a secret sympathy with Margarita. Roger was never fond of the stage, and I was. He preferred chamber-music and symphony to opera, and was never deeply sensible to the solo voice, though a good critic of it. The glamour of the stage—that lime-light that has eternally dazzled the sons of Adam—had little effect upon him: he was the last man in the world to marry an actress. Now, I was not. Judic, the naughty creature, had once her charm for me. I have stood in a crowd to see the Jersey Lily, and the Queen of English comediennes could have had me for a turn of her thick lashes—before I knew Margarita. My paternal grandmother was part French, and I have always observed that a mixture of blood predisposes its inheritors to dramatic triumphs—or enjoyments, if no more.

So he dug at his canal and Margarita practised her Jewel Song (it was a shade high for her: she was not a pure soprano, but had one of those flexible mezzos that tempt their trainers to all sorts of *tours-de-force*) and Dolledge tended Mary and Miss Jencks developed Caliban.

The good woman was utterly unhappy without some subject on which to exercise her really remarkable powers of education. Mary's attendant resented bitterly any rival

in her certainly well-filled sphere, and Margarita was far beyond her one-time mentor now, and regarded her with the affectionate tolerance of a princess for her old nurse. This was hard on the devoted Barbara, for she adored Margarita, and to find oneself gently sliding to the foot of the pedestal, when one has not so long ago been occupied in moulding the statue, cannot be very enlivening, though one be never so philosophical.

In truth I had at that time a strange sensation: I found that I had insensibly drifted into a state of mind in which we five, Roger, Miss Jencks, Dolledge, Caliban and I seemed to be at home, contented, occupied, attached by every interest domestic and romantic, to the spot that was dearest on earth to us, while Margarita, a brilliant bird of passage, but lingered with us for the moment, before she took up her journey through the world—for that she was destined for the world, who could doubt? We were, to use the homely old figure, like a circle of motherly hens, staring fatalistically, sadly or disgustedly, according to our several barnyard temperaments, at our daring, iridescent duckling as she breasted the (to her) familiar flood.

For it was familiar: there are people for whom—taken though they may have been from the most secluded corner of the earth, unprepared, undisciplined, unwarned, the great world, the glitter of its footlights, the shock of its tournaments, the cruelty of its victories, the coldness of its neglect, have absolutely no terrors. They face it superbly, as one should face a mob, and the great world, like any proper mob, licks their feet and fawns on them. Admiration is their due; devotion is no more than the sky above them or the earth under them; they keep the divine, expectant *hauteur* of childhood and rule us, like the children, through our pity and our wonder. And Margarita was one of these.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ISLAND TOMB

But to go back to Miss Jencks and Caliban. It was Harriet Buxton who had suggested that the boy was not so deaf as we had thought, only stupid, and that his dumbness might yield to the methods then being so successfully used with that afflicted child who has since triumphed so brilliantly over more than human obstacles. Although, as Harriet pointed out, I have always felt that too much credit was given in that case to the pupil and too little to the teacher. The distance between English words of one syllable and Greek tragedy is only a matter of time: the distance between blank chaos and those one-syllabled words might well have seemed eternal!

Not that Miss Jencks had quite such a task ahead of her. Caliban had been trained into habits of relentless cleanliness, and an almost mechanical regularity of routine work. It was his clumsy hands that had arranged the flaming nasturtiums in the silver bowl under the Henner etching, his rude pantomime that purchased the bi-weekly bone for the mysteriously named Rosy, his weather wisdom that was sought when it was a question of an extended sailing party. In fact, I am inclined to think, in view of his subsequent progress, that some of his ignorance was feigned, as is often the case in these instances of arrested mental development. However that may have been, on the occasion of this visit I found him marvellously improved, his hair cut, his nondescript garments evolved into a modest sort of livery, his vocabulary no longer a series of grunts, his very pantomime more

elastic. Margarita never changed her old methods of communication with him, but the rest of us, at Miss Jencks's earnest entreaty, fatigued ourselves amiably in order to elicit the guttural "yes" and "no" and "do not know" she had so laboriously taught him.

Best of all, his disposition had altered to a very considerable extent, and this improvement on his old surliness was of the greatest assistance to us on the occasion I must now narrate.

It was I—strangely fated to discover so many of the links in this wonderfully twined chain of Margarita's life—who stumbled by the merest chance on the last one really needed to complete the story. Zealous for the perfection of our Island, I selected a deep gully, filled with heavy boughs and loose unsightly rocks, as the next point for improvement, and bespoke the services of Caliban for the purpose. Greatly to my surprise, for he was attached to me, and always showed pleasure at rowing me over for my visits, he refused point blank to help me and even tried, in a series of clumsy ruses, to start me at work elsewhere. Vexed, but quite unsuspicious, I set to work by myself at pulling off the upper boughs, trusting to shame him into helping me with the stones, which seemed to have been tossed there in a sort of midden. When he found that I was persistent in my plan, he sat down at the edge of the gully, buried his face in his clumsy hands and wept silently, shuddering at every bough I lifted. Greatly interested now, I called Roger, and we worked together, assisted by the good-natured Italian retained now as gardener and assistant boatman (his name was Rafaello, and he was a not-too-unhappy bachelor, for, as he said, a girl who would run off with a man's rival a week before the wedding would have made but a doubtful wife for the most patient of husbands!)

As we neared the bottom of the gully Caliban grew more and more excited: now he would peer in fearfully, now run off a few yards, but he could never get very far away, for great

AH, FAITHFUL CALIBAN, WHAT HOURS OF TERRIBLE TUITION MADE THY TASK CLEAR TO THEE!

as was his terror and sorrow, curiosity was stronger and he must be near, it seemed, at all costs.

Suddenly, as the last rotting bough was lifted from one end of the gully, my eye was caught by a series of stones wonderfully matched in size, eight or ten of them arranged in a sort of rough cross, and when with a quick thrill of apprehension I pushed aside the withered pine tree that covered the rest of the stones, the foot of the cross elongated, and the symbol of Calvary was seen to extend over a slightly raised oblong mound of earth. There was no mistaking that shape nor those dimensions; whoever has heard the rattle of that last remorseless handful and struggled with that almost nauseating rebellion at the sight of the raw clods, so unsightly in the smooth, peaceful green, knows that mound for what it is, and we knew this. Silently we cleared away the rest, and then the grave I had discerned fell into its true and illuminating relation to two other and evidently older crosses—at the feet of both and at right angles to them. In her death as in her life that gaunt, austere Hester was faithful, and like the stone hound at the ancient knight's bier she guarded her master's last sleep.

We took off our caps reverently; we needed no monument, no epitaph to name for us those exiled, unblessed graves. Prynne had made the first cross, we knew, twenty-seven years ago; Hester had made the second a few days before Roger visited the island. And the third? Ah, faithful Caliban, what hours of terrible tuition made thy task clear to thee? I shudder at the picture of that indefatigable New England woman illustrating in terrible pantomime the duties that would devolve upon her loutish servant at her death. But the lesson had been learned, the third coffin taken from the boat-house, the body laid within it at the graveside, carried swiftly from the house wrapped in a sheet, the lid nailed down, the earth filled in.

Gaspingly he verified my quiet questions and surmises —I have enough New England blood to know what ghastly

forethought we are capable of!—and slowly he calmed himself, seeing that we were neither frightened nor angry . . .

One end of the island repeats on a tiny scale the formation of the original peninsula. Three quaint red cedars stand pointed and forever green, more like the cypresses of Italy than anything in America; around its rocky beach the waves beat incessantly, but its grass is fresh and green, for there is a little spring there. Under the cypresses lie three flat graves, two side by side, one across their feet, and over each lies a flat carved table of marble—rich carvings that once stretched under three heavy mullioned windows over the back doors of an old Italian palace. There are only initials on these tables, initials and the numerals of years, but they are not utterly unblest. Good Parson Elder read the most beautiful burial service in the world over them, broken by the tears of a trusty servant; the children and the children's children of the crumbling bodies under two of those tables stood over them hand in hand; and Nature, who bears no grudge nor ever excommunicates the fruitful, brings to the sunlight every year the yellow daffodils and white narcissus, the wild rose and beach bayberry, the marigold and asters that love has planted there.

It may be that further clues, more detailed accounts of that secret island life, were hidden in those coffins; we never tried if it was so. Unknown and lonely they lived, unknown and lonely they had wished to lie in death, and so we left them, safe even from ourselves, who loved them for the wonderful child they had given us. And I like to think that God is no less forgiving than the Nature through which he tries to lead us to him.

CHAPTER XXVI

A HANDFUL OF MEMORIES

THEY left in October that year; Margarita to get ready for her début, Roger, quiet and inscrutable, to work, as he said, at his treatise on Napoleon. He had grown deeply interested in this and spent most of his leisure at it, and it had gone far beyond his first idea of an essay. I did not go with them, but took the occasion for a filial visit to my mother and a grudging journey to North Carolina, where I stared uncomprehendingly at the chaotic hospital, a litter of bricks and scantling, listened to tiresome and enthusiastic statistics from young Collier and Dr. McGee, distributed papers of sweets to a ward of convalescent and sticky infants, and refused to take a toilsome journey around the borders of my one-time coal-lands. They were no longer mine—why should I care to view them?

Just before I left for Paris, where Captain Upgrove was to join me, I remembered some drawings I had planned to make in order to get the dimensions of the rambling, old-fashioned garden behind the house where I intended to put a certain ancient shallow stone basin I had in mind, and then beg Roger to pipe the spring into it for a sort of fountain-pool. There was such a basin on an old, decaying estate some miles out of our old school-town: Roger and I knew it well, for we had often been invited there by a friend of my mother's to drink tea and eat rusk and fresh butter and *confiture* (of field strawberries—delicious!) and—of all things—broiled bacon, because Roger was devotedly fond of it and never got it at school. How many June half-holidays have we

hung over that old carved basin, teasing the goldfish, stopping up the tiny fountain till it spouted all over us, sailing beetles across it on linden leaves, or lolling full-fed and lazy, smoking contraband cigarettes of caporal! I knew well how pleased he would be when he saw that battered dolphin that threw the water and the funny little stone frogs at each corner, and I had a shrewd idea that old Mrs. Y—— would not object to parting with it, moss and lichen and all, if one made it worth her while!

A cold, rainy week—the delayed equinox—caught and held me on the island, huddled over the fire, and it was then that I conceived the famous idea of the furnace. I had planned many a pleasant autumn there, for it was now the best of America to me, and if such weeks as this were possible (and probable) there would be little comfort for me away from the chimney corner—which has never been my favourite post, by the way. Caliban and Agnès, the cook, a kindly Normandy woman, did their best for me and for the ravenous gang of workmen that laboured (in the slight intervals between their meals!) at the monstrous, many-mouthed iron tube in the cellar; while I chafed and scolded at the delays, unwilling to leave the men, weary of my dear Island now its chief jewel was gone, irritated by the tramping feet and tuneless whistling where I had heard so much the patter of *petite Marie's* slippers and the rich melody of her mother's voice.

It was then that I fell upon Lockwood Prynne's library and learned more of his mind, I believe, than anyone else could ever know. I wish I had known the man himself. The little I have been able to find out about him in the South (the war practically wiped out the family) only confirmed my first idea of him. I actually succeeded in tracking an old album of daguerreotypes to a shiftless darkey cabin and identifying a picture of him as a boy from a half-blind negro mammy, with one of his father in full uniform and a singularly beautiful head that I am sure from the likeness of

the brow and the set of the eyes must have been his mother, though here the old slave could not or would not help me. I rescued, too, for Margarita, a rich carved mahogany chair from a cow stall ("ole Marse Lockwood's pay chair") and a graceful, brass-handled serving-table, "what his grandpa done leave fo' li'l Marse Lockwood fer ter rec'leck' him by." I picked up a silver cup, at a roadside auction (and bid high for it against a Fifth Avenue dealer) engraved with his mother's coat-of-arms, and shamelessly inveigled Margarita into taking it, later, and giving me in return the silver bowl that stood for so long under the Henner etching. It stands there still, but not in the old place. Not Caliban, but Hodgson fills that bowl to-day and every day that I am in America with the most beautiful flowers Uncle Winthrop's money can buy; though Lockwood Prynne no longer lies in the army cot that faces it, one of his best friends does—a friend who loves him no less, that he never saw his face.

Well, we got that furnace in and fifty tons of coal, too, towed over in an old scow and binned down in the cellar, and when I saw the bills for this last, I received the impression (which I have never been able wholly to abandon) that I must have been underpaid for those coal-lands!

Many a time have we discussed it since, with a curious, frightened wonder: why should that furnace have seemed so all-important to me? At best we expected to spend but few days at the Island when it could have been necessary; Margarita had grown up among Atlantic winters and had more times than she could count broken the ice in her bedroom ewer; such a luxurious whim would never have occurred to Roger, who, like most men of his type, expected every one to be as hardy as himself—how many generations of his ancestors had stoically toasted their shins while their backs were freezing! It must be, as Margarita teasingly insists, that my pathetic care for my rheumatic old bones was at the bottom of it all, and that I was rapidly assimilating one of the cardinal doctrines of the swollen

purse, that no sum could be ill spent when spent for my comfort.

Well, well, let it go at that—to use the bluff, pertinent phrase of the present day. Though Barbara Jencks would have died before she had let it go at anything like that, I assure you, and has spent many an eager moment of shy, persistent effort to make me comprehend the inscrutable and sleepless interest of Providence, an interest which had intended, from the time of the Exodus, if I seize her idea correctly, that a hot-air plant should complete the summer home of Roger Bradley—a man who had less interest in Providence than anyone I know! Poor Barbara! As I hung about the house that mellow autumn, I fell, more than once, into musing laughter, as here and there some piece of furniture, some picture or dish or oddment brought back to me her uncounted, endless assaults on Margarita's simple, healthy and (to the orthodox English woman) baseless scheme of existence. Not that it should have been dignified by so philosophical a term as "scheme": Margarita was given to the practice of life, not its theory. I never tired of watching the extraordinary effect of her downright mental processes upon the mass of perfunctory, inherited ideas whose edges, once sharp-milled and fresh from some startling Mint, we have dulled and misshapen with generations of unthinking, accustomed barter.

For instance, a treasure of a Spode fruit dish that I had picked up at a dewy Devonshire farm, all clotted cream and apple-cheeked children, caught my eye as it lay on the piano, and I found myself chuckling as I recalled the unfortunate eddy of doctrine into which the innocent bit of china had whirled us. Margarita had asked what the quaint Scriptural figures upon it illustrated, and Miss Jencks, every ready, had explained to her the parable of the labourers in the vineyard and the marvel of the late comer's good fortune.

"And that is a very beautiful thought, my dear," she concluded, "is it not?"

Margarita stared at her in frank surprise.

"Beautiful?" she echoed, "you call it beautiful that so many poor men should work hard so long, and then have to see the lazy ones who came in late be paid as much as they for one-tenth as much work? I do not know what you mean by beautiful; it was certainly very unfair."

"My dear, my dear!" poor Barbara fluttered, "it had the approval of our Lord, remember."

"He was probably not one of the ones who had worked all day, then," Margarita replied blandly.

"It was not an actual occurrence," said Miss Jencks, a little coldly, as Roger's irrepressible chuckle echoed from the porch outside, "it was merely a parable—a lesson."

"Oh!" (The exquisite, falling melody of that simple monosyllable expressed so perfectly, through such a trained larynx, all the sudden lack of interest!) "It never happened, then? So of course it does not matter. But why do you call it a lesson, Miss Jencks?"

"Because it teaches Christian charity," said Barbara firmly.

Margarita turned away and dismissed the subject.

"If I ever hired myself to anybody, I would rather he had been taught fairness than Christian charity," she observed, and left Miss Jencks clutching the fruit plate pathetically, her eyes fixed hopelessly on me. For it was always my delicate task to soothe the poor lady after these theological encounters: Roger's uncompromising treatment of the situation had a way of uncomfortably resembling his wife's!

"You know, dear Miss Jencks," I began, as seriously as I could, "she is not really cynical—she is no more irreverent than a child would be. Surely some of your pupils, sometimes . . ."

"Never, Mr. Jerrolds, never!" the bulwark of the Governor-General's family protested tearfully, "never, I assure you!"

"Well, well," I said, "it's all the same—they might have.

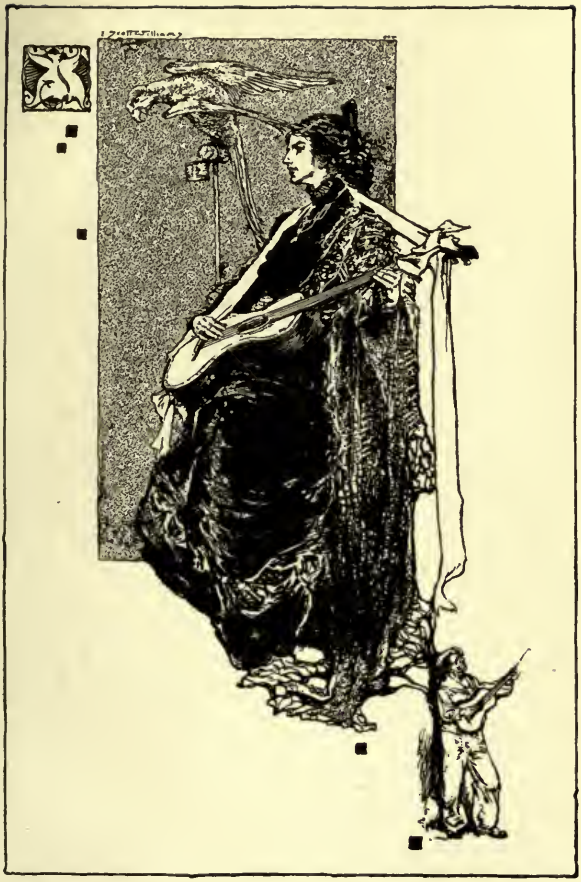
You see, she pays these things the great compliment of taking them seriously—and literally. And they wouldn't work, Miss Jencks, some of them, if one tried them, you know. Just consider the labour unions for one thing: suppose Roger were to pay off his workmen on that principle—they'd fling his money in his face."

"Then what would you say to the Prodigal Son?" she shot at me defiantly.

"I say that it's very beautiful and that I'm old enough to hope it may be true," I told her, "but for heaven's sake, Miss Jencks, don't try Mrs. Bradley with it—not just now, at any rate!"

Then there was her guitar, a small one, of lemon-coloured pear wood, curiously inlaid: Whistler got it for her in one of those old pawn shops near the London wharves, and we used to wonder what happy sailor, burnt and eager for the town, had brought it for what waiting girl all the long miles, and how it had crept at last, ashamed and stained, into that dingy three-balled tomb of so many hopes and keepsakes. He sketched her in charcoal, dressed (he would have it) in black, with a Spanish comb in her hair and the guitar on a broad ribbon of strange deep Chinese blue; behind her, on an aerially slender perch, stands a gaudy Mexican parrot. It does not look like her to us who know her well (though, curiously enough, all strangers consider it an extremely fine likeness) but as a *tour de force* it is remarkable, and amongst the plain, Saxon furnishings of the Island living-room it stands out with an extraordinary vividness—an unmistakable bit of Southern Europe, the perfectly conscious sophistication of old cities and sunny, secret streets, worn uneven and discoloured before Raleigh started across seas.

Roger never liked it, I believe, and I have always suspected the impish James of deliberately putting us face to face with Margarita's foreign strain and the tiny, deep gulf that cut her off, in some parts of her nature, so hopelessly from us. And he made us see it, too, that Puck of all painters, even as he



HE SKETCHED HER IN CHARCOAL, DRESSED (HE WOULD HAVE IT) IN BLACK

had intended, and we were forced to thank him for it, for it was too beautiful to have gone undone, and he knew it. And Jimmie's dead, worse luck, and one of his most devoted collectors told me last week that he really thought the psychological moment for selling out had arrived, for he'd never go any higher! And we're all grass, that to-day is and to-morrow goes into the oven, and there's no doubt of it, my brothers.

But how she used to sing *O sole mio*, with that sweet, piercing Italian cry, a real *cri du cœur* (except for the trifling fact that there was no more heart in it, really, than there is in most Italian singing! I suppose that while the art of song remains among the children of men, that particular child who is able to throw his voice most easily into what Mme. M——i used to call "ze frront of ze face" and detach it from the throat, where the true feelings lie gripped, will continue to thrill the other children with his or her "heart in the voice!") And how she would drag the rhythm, deliciously, intentionally, and shade the downward notes, and hang a breath too long on the phrase-ends, as only Italians dare! And how the distilled essence of Italy dripped out of those luscious, tender, mocking folk-songs, till the vineyards steeped before us, and the white city-squares baked in the noon sun, and the ardent sailor sang to his brown girl over the quaint, bobbing, weighted nets!

The men who dug the ice-house and piled the coast wall and blasted out trenches for draining would stop and lean on their picks, when her resonant, golden humming, like a drowsy contralto bee, floated out from the verandah vines to them: I have seen their faces clear and their dull eyes focus suddenly on some distant, darling memory, while they dropped back for a precious minute into the past that you think is all bread and cheese and beer, because, forsooth, they never sat beside you in white gloves when Margarita sang!

Go to—there was Spring and a girl for every man of them, once, and both were the same as yours.

I had to go into her room at that time, to make sure that the floor should not be unduly marred and that, according to the best of my poor judgment (Roger should have planned it all, as a matter of fact) the registers might be inserted in the best places; and as I moved among the dainty luxuries that replaced the almost sordid bareness of that room when I had first seen it, I realised, with surprise but with clear certainty, that the change was only apparent, not deep or inherent. They were all there, to be sure, the pretty paraphernalia that modern woman (and ancient, too, for the matter of that!) has found necessary to preserve and augment her mystery and charm; ivory and silver and crystal and fluted frills and scented silk. Oh, yes, they were all there, but there was no atmosphere of Margarita amongst them all: she had escaped out of them and given them the slip as effectually as in the old, bare days of the brush and comb and the print gown on a peg in the unscented closet. She was simply not there, that was all, and the most infatuated lover in all the Decameron would have felt that here was not the place for self-indulgent raptures. Margarita used her sleeping-room as a snail uses his shell or a bird its nest: it was impersonal, deserted, out of commission, now—the room, merely, of a beautiful woman, who might have been any woman, with a woman's need of comfort, warmth, clear air, and cleanliness pushed to an arrogance of physical purity.

My mother's bedroom was her own as definitely as her blue-veined, pointed hands; Sue Paynter's, into which I went once to lift out her little son in one of his illnesses, was like no one's else in the world, individual, intense; even old Madam Bradley's, in its clear whites and polished dark wood, translated to my boyish, awed soul, a sense of her impenetrable character.

But not so Margarita's. It was furnished and decorated in grey-blue tints, because I had suggested this. It had odd touches of greyish rose, because Whistler had insisted on it. It was fitted with old mahogany, because Roger

liked this and collected it here and there. But of all the personality that her father-lover had known how to build into his home of exile, there was absolutely none.

Was it because there were no work-baskets, spilling lace and bits of ribbon, no photographs, no keepsakes, hideous perhaps, but dear for what they represent, no worn girlhood's books, no shamefaced toys, lingering from the nursery, no litter of any other member of her family? Perhaps. Mme. Modjeska, then, and even now one of the greatest actresses on our stage, called it an unwomanly room, but I am not quite sure that this is precisely what she meant.

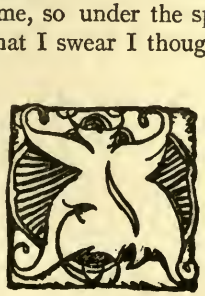
No, the most vivid impression the room could make upon me was one that brings a reminiscent chuckle even to-day. As my eye fell on the antique dressing-table, I seemed to see, suddenly and laughably, Margarita, sweeping down the stairs, enveloped in a billowy *peignoir*, her hair loose, her eyes flashing furiously, in her extended finger and thumb, held as one would hold a noxious adder, a thin navy-blue necktie.

"Is that yours?" she demanded tragically of her husband.

"Why, yes, I believe it is," said Roger, with the grave politeness that years of intimacy could never take from him.

"I found it *on my dressing-table!*" she thundered, and her voice echoed like an angry vault, "*on—my—dressing-table!*"

She dropped it like a toad at his feet, swept us all with the lightning of her eyes, coldly, distastefully, and swam up the stairs, an avenging goddess, deaf to Roger's matter-of-fact apology, blind to Miss Jencks's deprecating blushes. As for me, so under the spell of that voice have I always been, that I swear I thought her hardly used—the darling vixen!



PART EIGHT

IN WHICH THE RIVER RUSHES INTO PERILOUS RAPIDS

Come, my mother that carried me,
Make me to-night an olden spell!
Try if my witch wife loves the Sea,
Or she'll choose the waves or she'll choose for me,
Then hey, for heaven or ho, for hell!

Circle the Cross on the midnight sand,
Heap the fire and mutter the charm,
Call her out to ye, soul in hand,
Blind and bare to the moon she'll stand,
Then out to the sea or in to my arm!

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER XXVII

WE BRING OUR PEARL TO MARKET

I DID not hear Margarita sing in opera till the night of her *début* in *Faust*. Roger, on the contrary, was allowed to attend the last rehearsals: Margarita honestly wished for his criticism, which she knew from the very fact of his utter aloofness from her professional interests would be perfectly unbiased and sincere. It was not without a secret thrill of pleasure through my disappointment that I acquiesced in her decree; I knew that she would be nervous with me, from my very sympathy with her.

I can see the *Opéra* now—the lights, the jewels, the moustaches, the white shirt-bosoms, the lorgnettes, the fat women with programmes, the great, shrouding curtain.

Sue was there, pallid with excitement, and Tip Elder, who had come over for a much-needed holiday, and Walter Carter, who had been on an errand to Germany, and who had (of all unexpected people!) convinced Madam Bradley that her own hard pride should no longer be forced to regulate her children's enmities, and come to extend the olive-branch to Roger.

I was as nervous as could be and Roger, I think, was not quite so calm as he seemed and gnawed his lower lip steadily.

But Margarita, one would suppose, had not only no nerves but not even any self-consciousness. She told us afterward that before the curtain rose she was nearly paralysed with terror and was convinced that her voice had gone—it caught in her throat. She could not remember the words of the *Jewel Song* and her stomach grew icy cold—if Roger had been

there, she said, she would have begged him to take her away and hide her on the Island! But he was not there. No one was there but Madame and her maid, and she could not run away alone.

When she sat spinning at her wheel behind the layers of gauze, and *Faust* saw her in his dream, her legs shook so that she could not work the treadle. But when she paced slowly onto the scene in her grey gown all worked with tiny, nearly invisible little butterflies—they had made her put aside the big ones—she was as calm and composed as the chorus around her and her voice was as beautiful as I have ever heard it.

"The child was born for the stage, there is no doubt!" Sue whispered to me excitedly, and I nodded hastily, not wishing to lose a note or a movement.

It was her best-known part and she was very lovely and magnetic in it, but I do not think it really suited her so well as the Wagner dramas would have, later. It is with *Marguerite* as a great English comedienne expressed it to me some years later, of *Juliet:* one must be forty to play it properly—and then one is too old to play it properly!

But what a gait she had! Her stride just fitted the stage, her carriage of neck and head was such as great artists have worked years to attain—and she was unconscious of it. Her eyes looked sky-blue under the blonde wig, and the blonde tints were lovely, if not so fascinatingly surprising as her own.

When she stopped, fixed her great eyes upon *Faust* reproachfully and sang, like a sweet, truthful child,

Non, monsieur, je ne suis belle!
Ni belle, ni demoiselle . . . .

a little sigh of pleasure ran through the audience: she won them then and there. It seemed incredible that she was acting—it seemed that she must be real and that the others were trying to surround her with the reality she expected,

as best they could. She had the sweet purity of tone —the candour, if I may so call it, often associated with delicate, small voices and singers of cool, rather inexpressive temperaments. But *Brünhilde* was the part for her, and *Brünhilde* was not cool and anything but inexpressive.

The only *Marguerite* I have ever seen since that resembled hers was Mme Calvé's, and the French artist seemed studied and conscious beside Margarita. You see, she *was* young, she *was* sincere and ingenuous, she *was* slender and beautiful—and she had a fresh and lovely voice, well trained, into the bargain. She would never have made a great coloratura soprano. Neither her voice nor her temperament inclined to this. She belonged, properly speaking, to the advance guard of the natural method, the school of intelligence and subtle dramatic skill. I cannot imagine Margarita a stout, tightly laced, high-heeled creature, advancing to the footlights, jewelled finger-tips on massive chest, emitting a series of *staccato* fireworks interspersed with trills and scales apropos of nothing in this world or the next.

Such performances constituted Roger's main objection to the opera, and though he was considered Philistine once, it is amusing to see how the tide of even popular opinion is setting his way, now.

So in the great final trio, Margarita did not show at her best, perhaps; the situation seemed strained, unreal, and the final shriek a little high for her. But oh, what a lovely creature she was, alone in her cell! What lines her supple figure gave the loose prison robe, what poignant, simple, cruelly deserted grief, poured from her big, girlish eyes! And I do not believe anyone will ever again make such exquisite pathos of the poor creature's crazed return to her first meeting with her lover. So clearly did she picture to herself this early scene that we all saw it too, and lived it over again with the poor child.

"Ni belle, ni demoiselle . . ."

It was the whole of love betrayed, abandoned, yet loving and forgiving, that little phrase; and I staunchly insist that the good Papa Gounod deserves credit for it, sentimentalist though he be!

It was after the garden love-scene that she won her recalls, over and over again. Above the great sheaf of hot-house daisies I sent up to the footlights she bowed and bowed and bowed again and smiled, and the jewels flashed on her white shoulders and the yellow braids shook at her deep, triumphant breaths, as she beamed out over us all, the wonderful, all-embracing smile of the born artist, that cannot be taught. Part of that brilliant smile came straight into my misted eyes, back in the loge, and so extraordinary is the power of such a success, so completely does that row of footlights cut off the victor from us who applaud below, that I, even I, who had literally taught this girl some of the ordinary reserves of decent society, who had found her a savage (socially speaking) only two years ago, now bowed low to her, dazed, humble as the man beside me who never saw her before.

How they pounded and cried, those amusing, sophisticated, babyish Parisians!

"*Brava, la petite!*" I hear the old gentleman now that turned to me in amazement, chattering like a well-preserved, middle-aged monkey; "but it is that it is an American, they tell me? *Ça y est, alors!* It is extraordinary, then, *impayable! Je n'en reviens pas!*"

"And why, Monsieur?" I asked.

"For the reason, simply, that it is well known how they are cold, those women, cold as ice, every one. But this one—Monsieur, I have seen many *Marguerites*, I who speak to you, but never before has it arrived to me to envy that fat *Faust!*"

And I (to whom he spoke) believed him thoroughly, I assure you. Though I doubt if the portly tenor was much flattered, for he had accepted the rôle with the idea of

IT WAS AFTER THE GARDEN LOVE-SCENE THAT SHE WON HER RECALLS

carrying off the honours of the evening, and exhibited, in the event, not a little of that acrimony which is so curiously inseparable from any collection of the world's great song-birds. Ever since Music, heavenly maid, was young, she has been so notoriously at variance with her fellow-musicians as to force the uninitiated into all sorts of cynical conclusions! Such as the necessity for some kind of handicap for all these harmonies, some make-weight for these unnaturally perfect chords. And it is but due to the various artists to admit that they supply these counter-checks bravely.

Well I suppose they would be too happy if it were all as harmonious as it sounds, and we should all (the poor songless rest of us) kill ourselves for jealousy! And if the fat *Faust* had really been as supremely blissful as he should have been when Margarita, with that indescribably lovely bending twist of her elastic body, drooped out of her canvas, rose-wreathed cottage window and threw her white arms about his neck in the most touching and suggestive abandon I have ever seen on the operatic stage—why, we should have been regretfully obliged to tear him to pieces, Roger and I and Walter Carter (I am afraid) and the well-preserved Frenchman!

She was not so philosophical as Goethe nor so saccharine as Gounod, our Margarita, and I don't know that I am more sentimental than another; but when the poor child in all her love and ignorance and simple intoxication with that sweet and terrible brew that Dame Nature never ceases concocting in her secret still-rooms, handed her white self over so trustfully to the plump and eager *tenore robusto*, a sudden disgust and fury at the imperturbable unfairness of that same inscrutable Dame washed over me like a wave and I could have wept like the silly Frenchman.

Do not be too scornful of that sad and sordid little stage story, ye rising generation—it is not for nothing that the great stupid public of older days, ignorant alike of Teutonics and chromatics, but wise in pity and terror, as old Aristotle knew, took it to their commonplace hearts! Do not trouble

yourselves to explain to me that Gretchen was but an episode in a great cosmic philosophy; I knew it once, when I was young like you. But I am nearly sixty now—worse luck!—and I see why the cosmic philosophy has been quietly buried and the episode remains immortal! And so will you some day.

It was a great success for Madame and she basked in it; she had even a compliment for Roger. In our gay little supper, afterward, we had all a kind word—an almost pathetically kind word—for Roger. Margarita herself had never been so attentive to him, so eager for his ungrudging praise, so openly affectionate with him. He was very kind, very gentle, but in a quiet way he discouraged her demonstrative sweetness and led her to talk of her professional future. In her eyes as she looked at him over her wine-glass I seemed to see something I had never seen before, a sort of frightened pity; not the terror of a child cut off by the crowd from its guardian, but rather the fear of one who sees a one-time comrade on the other side of a widening flood, and regrets and fears for him and pities his loss and loneliness, but is driven by Destiny and cannot cross over. I wondered if the others saw it too, but dared not discover.

It was not altogether a happy *petit souper*, you see; I often think of it when I assist at similar gatherings, and wonder to myself if in all the glory and under all the triumph there is not some dark spot unknown to us flattering guests, some tiny gulf that is growing relentlessly, though we throw in never so many flowers and jewels to fill it. The wheel turns ever, and no pleasure of ours but is built on the shifting sand of some one's pain, even as Alif told me.

We had the *Valentin* of the opera, a dapper little Frenchman, with us (I forget his name: he had been very kind to Margarita and stood between her and the senseless jealousy of the big, handsome tenor more than once) and I heard him as we left the table remark significantly to Mme. M——i, with a glance at Roger,

"Monsieur is not artiste, then?"

"Surely that sees itself?" returned the famous teacher with a shrug.

"*Un mari complaisant, alors?*" said the baritone lightly.

Madame had never liked Roger, and was, moreover, a somewhat prejudiced person, but even her feelings could not prevent the irrepressible chuckle that greeted this.

"Do not think it, my friend—*jamais de la vie!*" she answered quickly, with a frank grimace as she caught my eye and guessed that I had overheard.

No, one could not image Roger as the "husband of his wife." It simply couldn't be supposed.

I had very little to say to him that night, myself. I felt clumsy and tactless, somehow, and certain that what I might say would be too much or too little.

It was Tip whose cheery, "How wonderfully fine she was, Roger! How proud you must be of her!" saved the day and gave us a chance to shake hands and leave them in the flower-filled coupé.

Well, after that it was all the same thing. Exercise, practice, performance, success; then sleep, and exercise again, *da capo*.

She was a prima donna now, our little Margarita, a successful artist, a public character. "Margarita Josépha," Madame had christened her, for twenty years ago simple American surnames found no favour with the impressario, and "*cette charmante Mme. Josépha*," "*artiste vraiment ravissante*," etc., etc., the critics called her.

As *Juliet* she looked her loveliest, as *Marguerite* she acted her best, as *Aïda* she sang most wonderfully. Indeed it was this last that captured London and gave rise to the much exaggerated affair of the Certain Royal Personage. She sang *Aïda* twelve times in one season (going to London from Paris) and the boys whistled the airs through the streets and the bands played from it whenever she rode in the Park I myself saw the diamond bracelet Miss Jencks returned

to the Duke of S—— (we did not tell Roger, by mutual consent, till much later) and the Queen's pearl-set brooch when she sang at Windsor marked at least one satisfying unanimity among members of the royal family.

I took Mary, long afterward, to hear Mme. G——i in the part Margarita made famous in London, and when the tears rolled down the child's face as poor *Aïda* (that barbaric romanesque) dies in melody, portly though starving, and unconvincingly pale, I wished she might have seen her mother. There was a death! Nothing in *Aïda's* life could possibly have become her like Margarita's leaving of it, I am sure.

Roger ceased to go after the first performances, and indeed he was very busy, and crossed the ocean more than once in the American interests of his French and English *clientèle.* But whoever stopped at home or went, whoever applauded or yawned, whoever approved of the present status of the Bradley family or disapproved, one gaunt figure never left Margarita's side from the moment she left her door till she returned to it (except for the inevitable separations of the actual stage-scene, and I think she regretted the necessity for these!) This figure was Barbara Jencks's, and hers were the cool, uncompromising eyes into which the enraptured devotee gazed when he followed his card into the drawing-room, hers the strong and knuckly hands that put his flowers into water and his more valuable expressions of regard back into their velvet cases, previous to re-addressing them. She drove with Margarita, when Sue Paynter did not, and would have ridden with her, I verily believe, had not Carter and I volunteered to supply that deficiency.

It was she who received that astonished and, I fear, disappointed kiss from the German officer at Brussels, when the students drew Margarita's carriage home from the opera house after her astonishing triumph in the last act of *Siegfried.* It was an absurd part for her—she had never done *Elsa* nor *Elizabeth,* and Mme. M——i was very angry with

her. Herr M——l, the great director, spent the summer in Italy and Switzerland and was with our party nearly all of the time. Purely to please himself he taught Margarita the rôle of *Brünhilde* in *Siegfried* and insisted on her singing it that winter in Brussels under him. It was wonderful, and showed me what her real *forte* was to be. She was *Brünhilde*, she did not need to act it. How the Master himself would have revelled in her!

She was very teachable—one of the most certain indications of her great capacities. Her *Marguerite* was almost entirely her own, for she had not learned how to use dramatic instruction; her *Aïda* was almost Madame's own, for she had learned, then, and besides, did not understand the character; her *Brünhilde* was herself, trained and assisted into the best canons of interpretation by a loyal Wagnerian. It is a short part, of course, but it showed what she could have done with the rest of it. At thirty-five she could have done the whole *Ring;* at forty I believe no one could have equalled her.

Carter got himself snarled hopelessly into a tangle with the government officials in Berlin (he was no diplomat, though a good fellow, and wild about Margarita, so that poor little Alice had more than one bad quarter-hour, I'm afraid) and it took Roger a great deal of Bradley influence with the American consul and a lot of patient correspondence to unravel his unlucky brother-in-law. This gave Roger a good excuse for being in and near Germany; whether he would have stayed without it, I don't know.

The work on Napoleon was done: he had laboured over it in Rome during the summer, and Margarita had been very sweet, refusing more than one invitation (at Sue Paynter's earnest request) to stay with him. But it was only too evident that she did not wholly wish to stay and that such a situation could not last long. Herr M——l kept her interested, and Seidl, whom he sent for to hear her practising for *Siegfried*, was most enthusiastic about her and displayed

his admiration a little too strongly for our peace of mind. His was a developing, forcing influence, and Margarita showed the effect of it wonderfully; he inspired her to her best efforts, and Mme. M——i was terribly jealous of him. Personally, I could not but feel that his undoubtedly great influence upon her mind and methods represented one of his many invaluable contributions to the musical history of America—but I speak as an observer, merely, of an American artist, not as a husband!

Roger and he had what must be confessed was a quarrel (though the newspaper accounts of a duel were, of course, absurd) over the advisability of her singing privately for a young German princeling whom Seidl was very anxious to honour—he was then introducing the Wagnerian dramas into America and had not been long director of the Metropolitan Opera House, New York. It all smoothed over and we agreed to forget it, all of us, but Seidl's pride was hurt and Roger had done what I had not seen him do for fifteen years—lost his temper badly. He was not pleasant in a temper, old Roger, like all men of strong, controlled natures, and Margarita learned a lesson that day that she never forgot, I suppose. I believe if on the strength of that impression he had carried her off bodily—flung her over his saddle-bow, as it were, and ceased to respect her rights for twenty-four hours, we should all have been spared much strain and suffering. But he regretted his violence and told her so, which was fatal, or so it seemed to me. There are occasions when not to take advantage of a woman is to be unfair to her, and Margarita was very much a woman.

Well, well, it's all over now, and we have no need to regret that we did not try a different way. It may be we should have had to pay a greater price—for nothing lacks its price-mark on life's counter, more's the pity, and if we are deceived by long credit-accounts, the more fools we!

CHAPTER XXVIII

ARABIAN NIGHTS IN ENGLAND

I HAD much to reconstruct that season in regard to Margarita. I had found her once before, in Paris, no longer a child, but a woman; I found her now no woman merely, but a woman of the world. It seems incredible, indeed, and I have puzzled over it many an hour when the demon of sciatica has clawed at my hip and Hodgson's faithful hands have dropped fatigued from his ministrations. How she did it, how an untrained, emotional little savage, with hands as quick to strike as the paws of a cub lioness, with tongue as unbridled as the tongue of a four-year-old, with no more religion than a Parisian *boulevardier*, with not one-tenth the instruction of a London board-school child—how such a creature became in two years an (apparently) finished product of civilisation, I am at a loss to comprehend. That she did it is certain. My own eyes have seen Boston Brahmins drinking her tea gratefully; my own ears have heard New York fashionables babbling in her drawing-room. As for London, she dominated one whole season, and not to be able to bow to her, when she rode on her grey gelding of a morning, was to argue oneself unbowed to! Paris can never forget her, for did she not invent an entirely new *Marguerite?* And the Republic of Art is not ungrateful. She would have been a social success in Honolulu or Lapland, the witch!

Whether her ancestor the prince or her ancestress the actress made her development possible, whether her Connecticut grandfather or her Virginia grandmother taught

her, how much she owed her bandit father who defied the world and her mother, the nun, who won it—both for love —who shall say?

When I look back on those wonderful months I find that the fanciful sprite whose province it is to tint imperishably the choice pictures that shall brighten the last grey days, has selected for my gallery not those hours when the footlights stretched between us, though one would suppose them beyond all doubt the most brilliant, but quaint, unexpected bits, sudden, unrehearsed scenes that stand out like tiny, jewelled landscapes viewed through a reversed telescope, or white sudden statues at the end of a dark corridor.

There is that delicious afternoon when we went, she and I and Sue Paynter and an infatuated undergrad, to Oxford together, and ate strawberries and hot buttered tea-cake and extraordinary little buns choked with plums, and honey breathing of clover and English meadows, and drank countless cups of strong English tea with blobs of yellow, frothing cream atop. Heavens, how we ate, and how we talked, and how tolerantly the warm, grey walls, ivy-hung and statue-niched, smiled through the long, opal English sunset at our frivolous and ephemeral chatter! They have listened to so much, those walls, and we shall perish and wax old as a garment, and still the tea and strawberries shall brew and bloom along the emerald turf, and infatuated youths shall cross their slim, white-flannelled legs and hang upon the voice of their charmer. Not the pyramids themselves give me that sense of the continuity of the generations, the ebb and flow of youth and youth's hot loves and hot regrets and the inexorable twilight that makes placid middle age, as do those grey walls and blooming closes of what I sometimes think is the very heart's core of England. My mother's countrymen may fill London with their national caravanseries and castles with their nation's lovely (if somewhat nasal) daughters, but Oxford shall defy them forever.

The infatuated undergrad was the owner of a banjo, an

instrument hitherto unknown to Margarita and in regard to which she was vastly curious, and at her request he and three of his mates blushingly sang for her some of the American negro melodies then so popular among them. She was delighted with them and soon began to hum and croon unconsciously, the velvet of her voice mingling most piquantly with their sweet throaty English singing. By little and little her tones swelled louder and more bell-like: theirs softened gradually, till the harmony, so simple, yet so inevitable, dwindled to the nearest echo and barely breathed the quaint, primitive words:

"Nellie was a lady—
Last night she died . . ."

Those deep tones of hers, stolen from envious contraltos, turned in our ears to a mourning purple; a sombre, tender gloom haunted us, and the sorrow of life, that alone binds us together who live, hung like a lifting cloud over all who came within the magic radius of her voice. The people gathered like bees to a honeycomb from all sides; black caps and pale clear draperies drifted into a wondering circle; the clink of cups, the murmur of gentle English voices died softly away and the silence that was always her royal right spread around her.

"Toll the bell for lovely Nell,
My dark . . . Virginia . . . bride!"

Who they were, those listening hundreds, I could not say for my life. I suppose they must have been some garden party—I distinctly recall the gaiters of a bishop and the coloured linings of more than one doctor's hood among them. They are as sudden, as unexplained in my memory, as those crowds in dreams, so definite, so individualised, where haunting, special faces stand out and hands clasp and shoulders touch—and all fades away. Around the vivid emerald lawn they group themselves, and Margarita, a pearl

in pearly trailing laces, sits on a stone bench, defaced and mossy, in the centre, at the back; the lads adore at her feet, the banjo drops tinkling handfuls of chords at intervals, the birds flutter through the ivy overhead, the watered turf smells strong and sweet in the fanlike rays of the slow sun; bright pencils of yellow light fall like stained glass among the immemorial ivy; the day goes, softly, pensively. . . .

"Toll the bell for lovely Nell . . ."

"Ah-h-h!" they sigh and melt, and I see nothing more. But the picture is safe.

Then there was the famous house-party down in Surrey, whither the elect of England, for some reason or other, seem to gravitate; whether because the long midsummer Surrey days appear to them the last stage on the way to a peaceful, well-ordered heaven, in case they expect to spend eternity there, or a temporary solace, in case they don't! Sue, to whom all musical Europe opened its doors on poor Frederick's account, had taken Margarita, to whom the said doors were gladly opening on her own, to one of the famous country houses of a county famous for such jewels, and when Roger and I turned up there, who should our host be but one of my old schoolmates at Vevay—younger son of a younger son, then, and unimportant to a degree, but advanced since by one of those series of family holocausts that so change English county history, to be the head of a great house and lord of more acres than seems quite discreet—until one is in a position to slap the lord on the shoulder!

To Sue and me the soft-shod luxury, the studious, ripe comfort of the great, hedged establishment, were frankly marvellous, accustomed as we were to the many grades and stages of domestic prosperity between this rose-lined ease and little-a-year; but Margarita, to whom the old red jersey of the Island was no more real than the barbaric trappings of *Aïda*, who accepted shells from Caliban or diamonds from *Mephistopheles* with equal *sang-froid*, displayed an

indifference to her surroundings as regal as it was sincere. Indeed, the two simplest people at that party (famous for years in country-house annals as the most brilliant gathering of well-mixed rank and talent that ever fought with that arch-enemy of the leisured classes, *Ennui*, and throttled him successfully for seventy-two hours) were the wife of an American attorney-at-law and the eldest son of England's greatest duke—the most eligible *parti* in the United Kingdom, a youth of head-splitting lineage and fabulous possessions.

They sat together on the floor of a chintz-hung breakfast room, spinning peg-tops all over the polished wax, for two rainy hours before dinner (which function was delayed half an hour to please them, to the awed wonder of the lesser guests and the apoplectic amusements of the young peer's father) and were the only occupants of the great house, except three collie pups who sat with them, to see nothing odd in the performance, though Saint-Saens was come over from Paris to accompany Margarita on the piano and the princess of a royal family was dressed in her palpitating best for the best reason in the world not unconnected with the son of an historic house!

Du Maurier drew a picture of it for *Punch* in his very best manner (it went the length and breadth of England) and then, at Roger's grave request, withdrew it from the all-but-printed page and gracefully presented him with it. It was wonderfully characteristic of both of them and prettily done on both sides, to my old-fashioned way of thinking.

Well, it was after that top-spinning that Margarita and the Fortunate Youth jumped up carelessly, kicked away the tops, and raced each other to the noble music room, a magnificent gallery, all oak and Romneys and Lelys, and there the Fortunate Youth sat down at the piano (Saint-Saens standing amused in the curve of it) and began to play the accompaniment of one of Tosti's great popular waltz-songs. It is no longer in favour, your waltz-song, though I have lived through a sufficient number of musical fashions to be

reasonably certain of its return to power, some day, but then it was at its height, and subalterns hummed them to military bands, from Simla to Quebec, and soft eyes dropped under those subalterns' right shoulders and soft hearts melted as the chorus was repeated by request, and the dawn found them still dancing—bless the happy days!

Now Providence had seen fit (displaying thus an astonishing lack of socialistic wisdom and an altogether regrettable tendency to give to those to whom much had already been given) to bestow upon this Fortunate Youth enough musical ability to have made the fortune of a pair of Blind Toms, so that he could play any and all instruments, instinctively, apparently, and almost equally well. He played also by ear, with the greatest ease, the most complicated harmonies, and could accompany anybody's singing or playing of anything whatever—if he happened to be in the mood for it.

"It is a thousand pities that one could not have found him in the gutter, that boy," as M. Saint-Saens confided to me, "it would have been of service to him!"

Which remark, being overheard, scandalised many good British souls horribly and caused the youth to blush with perfectly ingenuous and modest pleasure.

He sat down at the great Steinway and ran his long white fingers loosely over the keys, and said to Margarita, while the butler gazed in agony at his mistress, and the other guests, all arrayed for one of the climaxes of one of England's most temperamental importations from the kitchens of France, stood divided between interest and foreboding,

"I say, Mrs. Bradley, can you sing '*Bid me Good-bye and Go*'? I'm awfully fond of that."

"I can sing it if it is here," said Margarita placidly, "why not?"

"Oh, it's safe to be here," he answered easily, and sure enough, it was there, in a cabinet close by.

Well, it was banal enough, heaven knows—how else could

it have been popular? Lincoln was not a musician, so far as I know, but he knew that one can't fool all the people all the time! And the good Tosti, however light he may ring nowadays, had one little bit of information not always at the disposal of modern song-writers—he understood how to write for the human voice. Which has always seemed to me a very valuable acquisition, if one happens to be in the song-writing trade.

So when Margarita, with a quick glance at the obvious little melody, put her hands behind her back like a schoolgirl—she was dressed in a tight, plain little jacket and skirt of English tweeds, with stiff white collar and cuffs and thick-soled boots, and what used to be called an "Alpine hat"—and began to sing, to a slow waltz rhythm, one might not have expected much: indeed, the youth hummed audaciously with her, at first, and the other men, not one of whom was within many degrees of nonentity, beat time carelessly.

"*Is* there a single *joy* or pain
That I may *never* know?"

Stop a bit! What caught at your heart and worried you, Colonel, and stabbed a little under your D. S. O.? Were you quite fair to that lovely, high-spirited creature you married, all those years ago?

"*Take* back your love, it is in vain . . ."

Ah, Lady Mary, you are a good twelve stone nowadays, but when that poor younger cousin gave you that look in the garden and the roses crawled over the old dial in the moonlight, you were slighter, and crueler!

"*Bid* me good-*bye* and *go!*"

It was a waltz, oh, yes, but it was a very Dance of Death to those of us who had any parting to look back to, that changed our life—and we could never go back again and make it better; never any more. That was what cut so,

and Margarita, dark and slim like a plain brown nightingale, who leaves plumage to the raucous peacock because it matters so little what she, the real queen of us all, wears—Margarita spelled it out remorselessly, to the tune of a mess-room waltz, and told us that youth is only once and so sweet and for so little time! And the boy beside her smiled with pleasure and embroidered her rich, clear-cut phrasing and annotated it and threw jewels and flowers of unexpected chords through it and mocked the sad, charming fatalism of it as only spendthrift youth can.

> "*You* do not *love* me, no!
> *Bid* me good-*bye* and go . . ."

Cruel Margarita, how could you make the tears splash down the cheeks of the poor little princess, who knew what was expected of her and had no greater sin on her conscience than a tiny lock of her yellow hair always warm, now, in the breast of a ridiculous second cousin on a sheep-ranch in far Dakota, U. S. A.?

> "Good-*bye*, good-*bye*, 'tis better so . . ."

They stand so still in this picture, those big, non-committal British, each gnawing his lip a little under the drooping mustache; the women's shoulders are ivory against the panelled oak and bowls of Guelder roses in Chinese bowls; that beautiful line from the base of the throat to the top of the *corsage* which America has not to give her daughters, as yet, heaves and droops; the Romneys smile behind their wax candles in sconces. It is only a waltz of the street, but she has bewitched us with it, has our Margarita.

But strongest and clearest of all, keen in light and dense in shadow like a Rembrandt, I see that extraordinary night in Trafalgar Square, that night that surely lives unique in the memory of Nelson and the Lions, though most that shared it may be, and doubtless are—for they were not for various reasons long-lived classes of people—dead and dust by now. How and why we found ourselves at Trafalgar Square I

could not tell, though I went to the stake for it this minute. But I think it must have been that Margarita wanted to walk through the streets, a form of exercise for which she took fitful fancies at odd times, and that I, as was mostly the case, went with her.

We were all alone, for Roger, who shared our walks usually, when he was not too busy, had just left for Berlin an hour earlier, on one of his patient unravellings of Carter's diplomatic tangles.

It had been a dull, damp day—the kind of day that tried Margarita terribly in England, for she was much under the influence of the weather, and *le beau temps* brought out her plumage like her Mexican parrot in Whistler's portrait. Looking back at it all, too, I seem to feel, though with no definite reason for it, that she was perturbed and excited about something known only to herself, for she was strangely irritable on our walk, contradicted me fiercely, inquired testily who Nelson might be, then chid me for a dry old schoolmaster, when I told her, and such like flighty vagaries, inseparable, I believed, from her sex in general and her temperament in particular. If I have never taken the trouble to defend myself from the accusation of thinking The Pearl perfect in her somewhat spoiled relations with her best friends at this period of her life, it is because I have always considered that such people as are too inelastic in their views of human nature to realise that Margarita merely exhibited *les défauts de ses qualités* (as who of us does not, at one time or another?) are unworthy even my argumentative powers, which are not great, as I perfectly understand.

So she unsheathed her sharp little female claws and patted me mercilessly with them, and contrived to make me seem to myself a tactless, blundering fool to her heart's content that night, striding easily beside me, meanwhile, like a boy, though she had refused to change her high-heeled bronze slippers for more sensible footgear and carried the un-

reasonably long train of her black lace dinner gown over her arm. Roger did not care for her in black, and she seldom wore it, but had ordered this a few days ago from the great Worth, who then ruled those fortunate ladies who could afford to number themselves among his subjects with a sway he has since, I am assured, been forced to divide among other monarchs—the only monarchs left now to a Republic that has never denied that one divine succession through all her revolutions. For that monarchy Paris never will sing *ça ira;* for that principle she knows no cynicism; that wonderful juggernaut, the Fashion, shall never rumble across channel, it seems!

I had derided myself for a sentimentalist and spinner of fine theories when I had thought I detected a little defiance in her first assumption of this midnight black robe, with its startling corals on her arm and neck, and the foreign-looking comb behind her high-dressed hair, the whole bringing out markedly that continental strain that amused Whistler (naughty Jimmie!) and displeased Roger. But when she appeared in it that night determined on a dinner where most of the guests were highly distasteful to Roger, who had congratulated himself on a quiet evening at home; when she had dragged him to it at the risk of losing his only train and teased him shamefully all through it by the most ridiculous flirtation with one of the worst *roués* of Europe (Margarita was so fundamentally honest and so thoroughly attached to her husband that such performances could only be doubly painful to him, since they were obviously intended maliciously) when she sent him off before the long dinner's close without any but the most casual *adieux* and without the remotest intention of accompanying him, I was uncomfortably forced to the conclusion that this long-trained, inky dress was a veritable devil's livery, that she had put it on deliberately and that there would be no stopping her till the mood was off.

And now I find myself about to write a most unjustifiable

thing, in view of the possibility of these idle memories falling somehow, sometime, somewhere, into the hands of that ubiquitous Young Person to whom all print is free as air in these enlightened days. In America it has been the rule, to suppress such print as could not brave this freedom; in France, to suppress such Young Persons as could! There is something to be said for both methods, and each has, perhaps, its defects; the one producing more stimulating Young Persons, the other enjoying more virile prose.

Be that as it may, I am quite aware that my duty to the youth of Anglo Saxondom should lead me to state, sadly but firmly, that such conduct as Margarita displayed on the night in question could have had but one result—that of filling me, her friend and admirer, with a grieved displeasure and disgust; that her unwomanly carelessness as to the feelings of others and her wanton disregard of the wishes and comfort of those who should have been dearest to her lowered her in my estimation and greatly detracted from her charm in my eyes. But I am not writing particularly for the Young Person and candour compels me to state that she was quite as interesting to me as ever! I didn't think she had treated Roger very handsomely—true; but Roger had known that he was marrying a delicious vixen when he married Margarita, you see, and if I had begun to lecture her, there were too many others who would have been only too delighted to relieve her of my society. She abused her power sometimes, I admit it—but then, she had the power! And oh, the balm she kept for the wounds she gave!

As I have said, I have not the remotest idea of how or why we confronted Nelson and the Lions, I cannot by any effort of memory see us arriving or leaving; but I see myself pausing in my lecture on English history, as a lighted transparency, a straggling crowd and a band bear down upon us suddenly out of nowhere. It is a poor, vicious sort of crowd, the gutter-sweepings of London; pale, stunted lads, hag-

gard, idle slatterns, a handful of women of the street, a trio of tawdry flower girls. Around the band, which turns out to be only a big drum and a clattering tambourine, a group of men and women in a vaguely familiar uniform, the women in ugly coal-scuttle bonnets.

"What is that, Jerry?" says Margarita.

"That is the Salvation Army—let's get along," I answer.

But she will not, for she is curious, and I resign myself to the inevitable and wait. Their crude appeals are symbols born of a deep knowledge of the human heart they fight to win—gleaming light and rhythmic drum: the first groping of savagery, the last pinnacle of the most highly organised religious spectacle the world has yet elaborated. They gather near the fountain, they group about their lighted banner, and a drawling cockney voice afflicts the air. I can see the circle now—they form in the classic amphitheatre that knows no century nor country; a humpback pushing a barrow of something before him stops near us; a woman, coughing frightfully, leans on it, muttering to herself, staring at Margarita's scarf-wrapped head.

The cockney's address begins, "O my brothers . . ." but I do not attend: I want to get Margarita out of the growing crowd, listless, but lifted for a moment from their sordid treadmill of existence by the light and the muffled, rhythmic crush and the high-pitched sing-song. They must have followed for a long way, for they are churnings from the very dregs of London and alien to Trafalgar Square, and the officer on his beat looks at them suspiciously enough.

"Won't you give us a song, lieutenant?" says the speaker suddenly, "pipe h'up there, friends—many a sinner's saved his soul with a song—w'y not some o' you? Are you ready, lieutenant?"

I can see her so plainly, the pretty, worn little creature; pale as death and in no condition for street singing, evidently, but plucky and borne along by the very zeal of the Crusaders. The other woman, who cannot sing, shakes the tambourine,

a great, burly fellow, some rescued navvy, thuds at the drum, and her sweet, thin little voice rises, shrill, but wonderfully appealing, though the night.

"*I need Thee every hour,*
Most gracious Lord!"

It is not difficult now to see why the crowd followed; her voice is like a child's lost in the wood, but brave, and sure of ultimate protection; it has a curious effect of the country and the hedgerows. They listen eagerly, they like it.

"Come, Margarita, I think we ought to get away—the crowd is getting thicker. People are staring at us."

"No, no, Jerry, let me alone! Oh, see the poor woman, she is too ill to sing! She has lost her voice—do you know it?"

And so she has. With a clutch at her throat and a pathetic turn of her eyes to the speaker, the little lieutenant shakes her head at him and is dumb. He seats her deftly on a camp stool by the drummer, pats her shoulder, sends a friendly gutter-rat with the face of a sneak-thief for water, and turns to the crowd.

"Come now, friends, the lieutenant 'ere 'as lost 'er voice along o' you, an' tryin' to save yer! Can't you pipe up, some o' you? If some of you'd sing a bit with us, now, maybe we'd be able to take back *one* soul to Christ with us to-night. Can't one o' yer sing?"

"I will sing!" says some one near me—and it is Margarita!

I clutch her cape fiercely, but it slips off in my hand and she is at the drum, and the lane that opened for her closes for me, and I fight in vain to reach her—Oh, it must be a dream!

"I *need* Thee every *hour*. . . ."

Ah-h-h! The crowd sighs with the old familiar joy, the magic of the golden voice slips like a veil over the cruel angles of their broken lives and mists and softens everything.

She has a slip of printed paper in her hand and reads

seriously from it; some one holds the transparency near her shoulder for light—her white shoulders, bare in Trafalgar Square!

"I *need* Thee every *hour*,
Most *gracious* Lord,
No *tender* voice like *thine*
Can *peace* afford . . . ."

They are still as death, tranced in those liquid bell-tones. The great drum shivers, as it shivered, of old, a tom-tom, across the African desert; the old, primal thrill creeps through my blood—good heavens, is this fear? Is it superstition? *Is it religion?*

"I *need* Thee—oh, I *need* Thee!"

The woman sobs like a damned soul beside me; a man coughs huskily. Will no one stop her? They have wedged me so that I cannot breathe, I feel them gathering from the nearby streets. And there she stands, coral like blood on her bare neck, the scarf fallen from her black hair, the plea of all humanity pouring in a great anguished stream of melody out of her white throat.

"I *need* Thee oh, I *need* Thee,
Ev'ry *hour* I need Thee!"

The tambourine shudders barbarically across the smooth flood of her voice: it is the tingling crash of the Greek Mysteries—and I had thought it vulgar!

I hear hansoms jingling up—what will Roger say? He would kill them all, if he could, I know, and yet no one there would hurt a hair of her head—and does she not belong to the public?

God knows the poor devils need something—is it that, then? Is it a real thing? Do people fight for it like that? For this imperious Voice is agonising for something and the drum is the beat of its heart.

"Gawd's frightful hard on women," the poor creature beside me moans, and lo, the little dumb lieutenant is by

THEY ARE STILL AS DEATH, TRANCED IN THOSE LIQUID BELL-TONES

her side miraculously, and like a shifting kaleidoscope the crowd lets them through and she kneels, shaking, by the drum.

Their white faces heap in layers before me; drawn, wolfish, brutal in the flaring lights they peer and gasp and sob, like uncouth inhabitants of another world—wait a bit, Jerry, it is your world, just the same, and perhaps you are responsible for it? Ugh!

"I *need* Thee . . ."

"Gad, it's little Joséfa!"

The clear English voice cuts across the hush, and,

"What a lark!" answers a deeper bass.

He is a very important and highly conventional personage, nowadays, that slender pink dandy, with five grown daughters and a Constituency; but if by any odd chance he should read this, I will wager he forgets what he is actually looking at for a moment and sees against the black shadows and rising night fog of Trafalgar Square a beautiful, black-robed woman in red corals lifted to an empty barrow by two eager club-dandies and held there by a gigantic Guardsman—the best fencer in Europe, once!

Oh, Bertie, the Right Honourable now, the always honourable then, do you know that there were tears on your pink cheeks? And your noble friend, who broke up his establishment in St. John's Wood the next day and founded the Little Order of the Sons of St. Francis, does he know that the lightning stroke that blinded him like Saul of Tarsus and sent him reeling from Piccadilly to the slums, lighted for a moment, as it fell, the way of a dazed, rheumatic bachelor from America, who saw the terror in his eyes and the sweat on his forehead as he held his corner of the barrow and Margarita drove him to his God?

"Ev'ry *hour* I *need* Thee . . ."

The fog rolls over us, the lights flare through a sea of mist; the Honourable Bertie produces a hansom, from his pocket

apparently, and the wild, dark etching is wiped out like a child's picture on a slate.

Margarita falls asleep on my shoulder, I gain my usual philosophical control, gradually, and realise, now the echoes of that agonised pleading have ceased to disturb my soul, that the woman beside me is not even a Christian, technically speaking, and knew not, literally, what she did!

The magic of the Golden Voice—ah, what magic can cope with it? Of all the pictures hers has painted for me on those miraculous, grey-tissued walls where memory lives, this strange coarse-tinted sketch—a very Hogarth in its unsparing contrasts—stands out the clearest. At night, when I close my eyes and think "London," then does that poor sister of the streets moan to me that "Gawd's frightful hard on women," and fight her way to Margarita—who has been favoured beyond most women, and knows not God—at least, not that implacable deity of the London slum! Whenever I hear or read the phrase "Salvation Army" then do I see a young exquisite with a white camellia in his buttonhole, gazing like a hypnotised Indian Seer at a crude transparency blotted with unconvincing texts, then rushing off to found a celibate order—from Margarita, who was no more celibate that Ceres the bountiful!

Ah, well, the Way is a Mystery, as Alif said, and who am I that I should expect to solve it, when kings and philosophers have failed? At any rate, I have my pictures safe.

CHAPTER XXIX

FATE GRIPS HER LANDING NET

SHE sang her French rôles in Germany and three times in *Siegfried*, and was getting ready for Paris again when a long letter from Alice Carter besought us all to come to Boston as quickly as might be. Old Madam Bradley had been stricken suddenly with paralysis. One side of her body was beyond movement, but the other was as yet unimpaired, and by a series of questions they had found out that she wanted to see Roger—and Roger's wife—before she died. Nor was this enough, for the proud, afflicted old creature, when their ingenuity had failed, traced left-handed upon a slate, with infinite effort, my initials: evidently she wanted to make her peace in this world before she left it.

Margarita demurred a little and I, for one, should be the last to blame her. Greater knowledge of the world and especially her acquaintance with Walter Carter, who did not hesitate to blame his mother-in-law, had taught her to appreciate Madam Bradley's neglect, and her feeling for death had none of the sacred respect custom breeds in us—at least outwardly. She had just begun to study *Lohengrin* and a charming week at a French *chateau* with Sue had given her a taste for the society she liked and ornamented so well. She suggested that Roger and I should go alone, leaving her with Sue, and we (Sue and I) trembled for the outcome, for she seemed rather determined, to us.

But we had not counted sufficiently on Roger's sense of what was right and just. What might be considered a slighting of his personal claims he could endure patiently; what

was due to his family and position he could not ignore. Quietly he cancelled Margarita's early contracts, secured passage and dismissed the servants.

"Be ready to sail on Saturday, *chêrie*," he said, "I want my mother to see you very much, and Mary, too."

"Very well," said Margarita, round-eyed and breathing fast, and Barbara Jencks clapped her hands noiselessly. She adored Roger, as did all his servants and dependents, for that matter.

We reached Boston with the first early snows, and though his mother's face was set and her hand steady as she laid it on his head, I think they understood each other and were grateful from their hearts for that hour of reconciliation. For Margarita the stately silver-haired figure with immovable features and fixed, withdrawn gaze held some unexpected and inexplicable charm. She kissed Madam Bradley willingly, set the little Mary on her lap and beguiled the child with every graceful wile to laugh and crow and exhibit her tiny vocabulary. She sang by the hour, so that the gloomy house —brightened now, for the baby's health—echoed with her lovely notes. Bradleys and Searses and Wolcotts flocked to meet her and spread her fame and charm abroad; and Roger forgot for a while the load he carried and seemed like himself again. Even Sarah capitulated, and that before very long, too. I saw her actually wiping away a tear as she watched Madam Bradley lift with great effort her cold white finger and trace the outline of her grandchild's face: the little Mary was the image of her father and a fine Bradley, with only her mother's quick motions and mobile smile to remind one of that side of her ancestry.

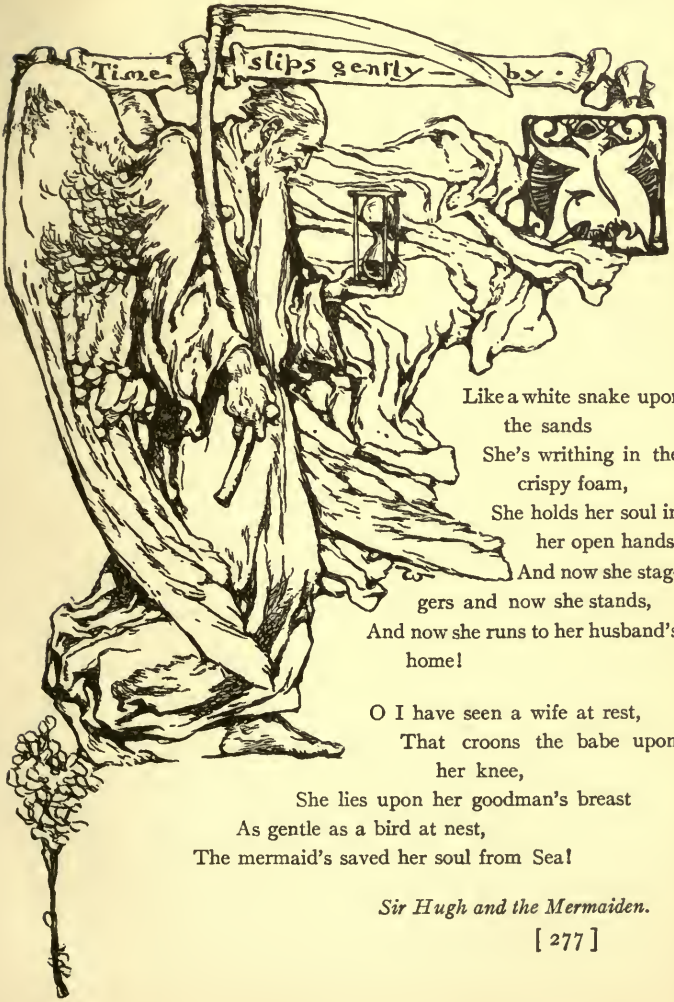
Of course Madam Bradley was not demonstrative, nor even cordial, from any ordinary point of view, but from hers, and in the light of our knowledge of her, there was a tremendous difference. Already she had given little Mary a beautiful diamond cross and the famous Bradley silver tea-service. Sarah had softened wonderfully, too, and seemed to

feel that since her aunt did not die, it was incumbent upon her to pay her debt to heaven by burying the hatchet. I don't think I ever quite did Sarah justice, so far as her feeling for Madam Bradley went—she appeared to be deeply and genuinely attached to her and was sick with anxiety when the stroke took her. She shared perfectly the grandmother's feeling over the baby, and Margarita's good taste in presenting Roger with such a perfect Bradley was set down to her credit with vigourous justice. For she never forgave poor Alice for the brown little Carters. Alice's children resembled their father, and Sue's (almost grandchildren, in that house) were sickly and comparatively unattractive; but Margarita's daughter, perfect in health, beautiful as a baby angel, active, daring, and enchantingly affectionate, satisfied the old lady's pride completely and she sat for hours contentedly watching her sprawl on an Indian blanket on the floor.

Either the comfort of renewed relations with her children mended her health or the fatality of the shock was overestimated, for she did not die, not then nor for many years, but lived, happier, perhaps in her affliction than before it, for the bond between her and Roger and Mother Mary, strengthened when she was preparing for death, never loosened again, and more than once, a black-robed, white-coiffed figure has visited the home of her father's like a slim shadow, and carried with her one of the Church's greatest blessings, surely—the healing of old wounds and the restoring of human loves.

PART NINE

IN WHICH THE RIVER FINDS THE SEA



Like a white snake upon
the sands
She's writhing in the
crispy foam,
She holds her soul in
her open hands,
And now she stag-
gers and now she stands,
And now she runs to her husband's
home!

O I have seen a wife at rest,
That croons the babe upon
her knee,
She lies upon her goodman's breast
As gentle as a bird at nest,
The mermaid's saved her soul from Sea!

Sir Hugh and the Mermaiden.

CHAPTER XXX

A TERROR IN THE SNOW

WELL, they stayed the month nearly out, and then Roger took a fancy to see the Island in winter, and I, hugging to my breast the consciousness of that furnace, was easily persuaded to go with them: it is January, February and March that punish me so fearfully in the North, and really only the last two of those. I had thought Margarita a little *distraite* and cold to us all, toward the last, and feared she was resenting her exile: she took a short trip to New York, accompanied, of course, by the faithful Jencks, and I had visions of American contracts, but Roger never mentioned the subject—didn't even ask her why she went, I believe, she hated to be questioned so.

We found everything in first-rate order (I had written ahead to light the furnace) and you should have seen Roger's face when he noticed the registers in the big room! Like a boy's when some good-natured trick has been played upon him. Suppose we had not had them nor the coal—it makes me cold now to think of it.

I find I can't write about it very fully, after all, and I must be forgiven if I cut it short. It's a little too near, yet, after all the years. I know I never want to see snow again—it is the most cruel blue-white in the world.

We stopped the night, of course, and in the morning Roger and Margarita went for a walk on the crust, for it had snowed all night and the evening before—the great, fat, grey clouds were full of it—and we thought we were in for another blizzard like last year's. It had "let up" for

a little, as they say about there, but Roger was afraid to risk going away till it had definitely ended, so they went for their walk, and I chatted with Miss Jencks by the fire. They had been gone about an hour when we heard a great scratching and whining at the door (I thought for a moment it was Kitch) and Rosy bounded in, snapping his teeth and glaring fearfully. We both jumped up and he flew at me and caught my sleeve in his teeth—for a moment, I confess, I felt a little queer, for I had seen him throw Caliban and hold him—then, as I drew back, he uttered the most heart-rending howl I have ever heard, and spun wildly around, and at that moment I felt suddenly that something was up and that I was wanted. Miss Jencks felt it at exactly that moment, too, and ran for my great-coat before I asked her.

She says that I said,

"Where are they, old fellow? Go seek!" but I don't remember it. I know that she said in a low voice,

"I shall be of no use—I can't run—but I will have everything ready," though she says I must have imagined it.

Rosy flew through the door and I after him—she had the sense to bring me my heavy arctic overshoes, or I should have slipped in a minute—and I ran for about fifty yards.

Then something stopped me. Where it came from, *what* did it, I don't know and can never know, but I swear I heard a low, distinct voice close to me (not a cry, mind you, but a quiet, hoarse voice) saying,

"Get a rope. Get a rope."

I checked like a scared horse and nearly fell.

"Get a rope," I heard again, "*get a rope.*"

Then, cursing at myself for a crazy fool, I actually turned, with Rosy showing his teeth at me, and dashed back (all those precious yards!) and grabbed a pile of rope Caliban had brought out to bind some big logs for hauling and abandoned under the eaves when we arrived on the island. Rosy was far ahead now, but he had gone through the crust at intervals and I tracked him by that.

I LEANED OVER THE BANK AND CRIED THAT I WAS THERE, BUT SHE NEVER STOPPED—IT WAS TERRIBLE

Suddenly the wind—it was blowing a steady gale behind me—shifted, and I heard a succession of terrible cries, great hoarse, high shrieks, like nothing human and yet unlike any animal. Wordless, throat-tearing screams they were, and I shouted back, against the head-on wind,

"Coming! Coming! Hold on! I'm coming!" till I coughed and strangled and had to stop.

How I ran! I never did it before and certainly never can again. Rosy's tracks curved and twisted, and I felt I was losing time, but dared not risk missing them, for I was coming nearer to that awful voice steadily, though it echoed so I should have been helpless without any other guide.

Well, I found them. Roger up to his shoulders in icy water, his head dropped back, white, on her arm, and she up to her waist on a slippery ledge under the highest point of the bank—the bank that I blasted out! She was caught, I could see, on a jagged point by her heavy, woollen skirt (it was made in London, bless it!) and must have wedged her foot, besides, in some way, for she had his whole weight; her lips were blue. She wore a blood-red cape, all merry and Christmas-like against the white ledges, and her hair streamed in the wind. Her head was thrown back like a hound's and those blood-curdling screams poured out of it; her eyes were shut. Now and then Rosy bayed beside her, scratching at the snow, and where the water was not frozen in the protected pools it swirled like a mill-race around the nasty, pointed rocks.

I leaned over the bank and cried that I was there, but she never stopped—it was terrible. Finally I made a slip-noose and actually managed to fling it over his head—Roger had taught me to do that at school, twenty years ago—and that stopped her, hitting against her cheek, and she opened her eyes.

"Put it under his arms, can you?" I cried, and after several efforts, for she was nearly frozen stiff, the brave,

clever creature did, and I got it around a tree on the edge. Then I stopped, panting, for I realised that I could do no more. The run had taken all the strength out of me—I couldn't have dragged a cat—and she was little more than a foot below me!

I can't write about it. My arms ache now, just as my infernal shoulders ached with that paralysing, numb ache then.

"Listen!" I cried, for she had begun to scream again, "listen, Margarita, or I will beat you! Is he unconscious?"

She nodded.

"Can you hold on five minutes, with his weight gone?"

She blinked in a sort of stupid assent.

"Could you for ten? Are you braced solid?"

Again she blinked, and with an inspiration I plunged my shaking hand into my great-coat pocket and pulled out a brandy-flask. Miss Jencks had taken it from the side-board.

I tied it into my handkerchief, opened, and swung it down to her, and she got her lips around it and coughed it down. It acted instantly and she could move a little, and while I encouraged her, and after several heartrending failures, which nearly spilled all the brandy, she got it into his mouth between his teeth, as his big body swung in the noose. It ran over his chin and down his neck, but a little got in, and his eyelids quivered. Soon he coughed, and I dared not wait another second.

"I am going for Caliban," I said very distinctly, "we will pull you out in a few minutes. Let him alone and hang on, do you hear? Don't scream any more—you are safe. Pour all the brandy into him—tell him he is tied fast. Don't try to move—you may slip, and tear your skirt. Hold on!"

Then I turned my back on them and ran, or rather stumbled off. I leaned over and kissed her forehead, first.

I remember muttering, "I never asked before—if You

or Anybody is there, save them! Take me and save them!" and then I stumbled on and on. . . .

It was not too long. Caliban was coming with his big wood-sled and more rope and blankets, and as I caught sight of him the most extraordinary thought flew into my mind, which worked with a dreadful clearness, for I saw them stiffen and sink and slip away every second. Rosy bayed just then, and as my heart sank, for I thought they were gone, it suddenly occurred to me what Rosy's name must have been!

"It's *Rosencrantz!*" I muttered, "and the one Margarita insists was called 'Gildy' was *Guildenstern*, and they were *Hamlet's* friends—poor Prynne!" Perhaps that wasn't idiotic—I laughed as I stumbled along!

Well, they were there, and Roger was enough himself to strike out with his feet a little and avoid hindering us, if he couldn't help much. I made another noose for her, and she hung in it while Caliban dragged him up—the fellow had the strength of an ox and showed wonderful dexterity—and later crawled down the rocks and cut her skirt through with his big clasp-knife. She was the hardest to move, for her foot was caught—all that saved her. I thought we should break her ankle before we could get her.

We laid them on the sledge, wrapped in blankets, poured in more brandy, and Caliban attached Rosy to it by his collar—an old trick of his, it seems—and they dragged us all home, for my worthless legs gave out completely.

Miss Jencks and Agnès rubbed them and mustard-bathed them and I wrote telegrams for Caliban to take in the launch—wrote them as well as I could in the clutches of a violent chill, with my teeth like castanets and my hands palsied—and even as I wrote, it came to me that Margarita had repeated monotonously, all the way home, in a hoarse, painful voice (but, mercifully, a low one) "get a rope, get a rope, get a rope."

It was the voice I had heard, that turned me back!

She was all right, but very weak and sore and with a little fever—not much. She was perfectly conscious of everything within an hour, and told us about it: how she had slipped and Roger had hit his head and strained himself in going after her. She thinks she held him under the arms ten minutes, screaming all the time! She sent Rosy back, finally, though at first he refused to go.

Roger was delirious for five days and very dangerously ill for three weeks—it was double pneumonia. Miss Jencks had seen it before and it was her prompt measures before we could get the doctor or Harriet that saved him, they think. It was a bad age for pneumonia; Harriet said she would rather have pulled Margarita through it. She brought a deaconess from the little dispensary with her and one or the other was watching him like a cat every second, for three weeks. It was a nurse's case, the doctor said, though he stopped the first week.

When Margarita came to herself after an hour or so, she asked for me, and as I knelt by her bed and she turned her great eyes on me I caught my breath, for I was looking at a new woman. I can't describe it better than by saying that she had a soul! There had always been something missing, you see, though I would never have admitted it, if she hadn't got it then. But it was there.

It was very pathetic, those first days when Roger was delirious: she was nearly so herself. And yet it was not wholly grief—there was a definite reason for it, which we all felt, somehow, but she would not give it.

"Will he not know me for a minute, a little minute, Harriet?" she would beg, so piteously, and Harriet would soothe her and try to give her hope. The fifth day he was very low and the doctor told us to make up our minds for anything: he hadn't slept all night. I took Harriet by the shoulders and asked her if she could not possibly make him conscious—before. I don't know why I asked her and not the doctor, but I did. She promised me she would try

(I think she had nearly given up hope, herself) and at three the next morning she called me and said that I might have a chance—that he might know us for a moment. Margarita was by the bed: her face was enough to break your heart.

"Only a minute, Harriet—only a little minute!" she pleaded like a baby. I don't know what insane vow I didn't offer . . . He opened his eyes and they fell on her. She put her hand on his forehead and said very plainly.

"Listen, Roger, you must listen. It is I—Margarita, *Chêrie*, you know. Do you hear?"

His eyes looked a little conscious, and Harriet held his pulse and slipped something into his mouth. In a moment we all knew that he knew us.

"Now say one thing, Mrs. Bradley—quickly!" Harriet whispered.

Margarita bent like a flash and whispered in his ear very swiftly: her whole body was tense. You should have seen his eyes—he was old Roger again! I could see his hand press hers and she kissed him just as the flash went by, and he took to muttering again.

Harriet pushed her away and put her hand on his forehead, then nodded at the deaconess.

"Call the doctor!" she said sharply, and I thought it was all over. . . .

But it was the turn, and after that by hair's breadths and hair's breadths they pulled him over.

"Now he knows, Jerry," Margarita said to me, and went to bed herself.

It was a good week after that, when the doctor had gone and we were all breathing naturally again, that Harriet asked me abruptly if I had noticed Mrs. Bradley's voice. I said yes, that it was still decidedly husky. She looked at me so sadly, so strangely, that my nerves fairly jumped—we had all been on edge for a month—and I commanded her rather sharply to say what she meant and be done with it.

"Is her voice injured?"

"I am afraid so, yes," she said gently.

"But surely time and rest and proper treatment," I began, but she shook her head.

"The doctor examined her throat before he left," she said. "Of course he had no laryngoscope with him, but he didn't need one, really. The vocal cords are all stretched —he said the specialists might help her and take away a great deal of the hoarseness, but that in his opinion she can never stand the strain of public singing again: he thinks excitement alone would paralyse the cords."

"Who's to tell her?" I said quietly.

You see, we'd all been stretched so taut that we couldn't use any more energy in exclamations or regrets.

"I thought you might," she said, but I shook my head.

"Miss Jencks—" I began, but it appeared that Miss Jencks felt unequal to it. So Harriet told her, of course, on the principle that when one has a heavy load he may as well carry a little more, I suppose.

And after all it wasn't so bad; for Margarita came down to me a little later, and told me she had known it all the time!

"But, of course, dear child," I said hopefully, "Doctor ——is not a throat specialist, you know, and we can but try some of those famous fellows, a little later. Perhaps in a year or two——"

"You are very good to me, Jerry," she said, "but it is no use. I know. I shall never sing again. I am sorry, because——"

"Sorry?" I cried, "why, of course you are sorry! What do you mean?"

"Because," she continued placidly, "it will not be so much to give Roger."

"Give Roger?" I echoed stupidly, "how 'give Roger'?"

"I was not going to sing any more, anyway," she said.

For a moment I was dazed and then the simplicity of it all flashed over me.

"Why, Margarita!" I cried—and that is all the comment I ever made.

"That was what I wanted to tell him when he did not know me," she explained. "I—I was going to tell him the night—the night it happened."

"And does he know it now?"

"Of course. That is why he got well," she said promptly.

And do you know, I'm not sure she was wrong? That life was killing him—I mean it ran across his instincts and feeling and beliefs, every way.

There was no doubt she meant it. She never referred to the subject again.

He wanted her to see somebody else about her throat, but she absolutely refused to leave the Island till he was out of bed—Sarah came on with the baby two weeks later—and they sat by him all day nearly, the two of them, and he hardly let go her hand. He had changed a great deal in one way—his hair was quite silvered. But it was very becoming.

I didn't leave till I saw him in a dressing-gown in a long chair by the fire. Harriet went back to her hospital, and when Roger was up to it they went South for a bit before he began to work again.

The day before I left he did an odd thing—one of the two or three impractical, sentimental things I ever knew him to do in his life. He asked me to bring him his history of Napoleon—it had been packed into their luggage by mistake—and deliberately laid it on the heart of the fire! I cried out and leaned forward to snatch it—to think of the labour it represented!—but he put his hand on my arm.

"Don't, Jerry—I hate every page of it!" he said.

Well, I have been wondering these twenty years if perhaps they'll talk about it—the whole thing—some day. At the time, we all acted as if it were the most natural thing in the world for Margarita to settle down as a *haus*

frau—perhaps when *Nora* got done with her studies of life (for I read Sue's Ibsen, you see) that is what she did, after all!

At any rate, I frankly hope so. For if all the wisdom and experience and training that the wonderful sex is to gain by its exodus from the home does not get back into it ultimately, I can't (in my masculine stupidity) quite see how it's going to get back into the race at all! And then what good has it done? I hope Mr. Ibsen knows!

CHAPTER XXXI

FATE EMPTIES HER CREEL

[From Sue Paynter]

Paris, Feb. 10th., 189—

Jerry Dear:

What must you think of me for delaying so long to write, after the few curt words I found for you that night? I hope you know that something must have kept me and have forgiven me already. Poor little Susy was taken very sick the night you sailed, with violent pains and a high fever. Fortunately there is a good American doctor here—a Doctor Collier—and we pulled her through, though it seemed a doubtful thing at one time. The doctor decided that she had appendicitis (I never heard of it before) and operated immediately on her, which undoubtedly saved her life. It seems that Mother Nature is not quite so clever as we have always thought her and has left a very dangerous little *cul-de-sac* somewhere, that ought not to be there, so modern science takes it out. Isn't that strange? The doctor has just come over to operate for this in Germany somewhere; he was an assistant of Dr. McGee, whom you sent to the South, and can't say enough of the magnificent work he is doing there. He was much interested to find I knew all about it and that Uncle Morris stocked the dispensary. Isn't the world small?

I hope you're not feeling too badly about Margarita—don't. Of course I understand what the stage has lost, and you will confess that I was as anxious for her career as anybody, even when I was sorriest for Roger. I wanted her to have her rights as an artist. But if *she* doesn't want

them—ah, that's a different pair of sleeves altogether. She has sent me her latest photograph, and the eyes are all I need. Of course, I have no such brilliant future to sacrifice, but if I had, I am sure I should throw a dozen of them over the windmill for two eyes like hers to-day!

I don't know why I am prosing along at this rate and avoiding the main object of this letter. I must plunge right into it, I suppose, and get it over.

Don't think I don't appreciate all your kind, your generous, offer meant, Jerry. I thought of it so often and so long before I gave you that brusque answer. And it tempted me for a moment—indeed it did. I think, as you say, that we could travel very comfortably together and we have many of the same tastes—I know no one so sympathetic as you. As for "nursing a rheumatic, middle-aged wanderer through assorted winter-climates," that is absurd, and you know it, though I should be glad enough to do it, if it *were* true, as far as that goes. I know all you would do for the children, and how kind you would be to them. Not that I like that part, though, to be quite frank. I could never love another woman's children (especially if I loved their father) and I can't understand the women that do. So I always imagine a man in the same position. And I can't help feeling, Jerry, that if you *really* loved me—loved me in the whole crazy sense of that dreadful world, I mean—that you wouldn't speak so sweetly about the children: how could you? How can any man—I couldn't, if I were one!

But this is very unfair, because you never said you did love me in that way—don't imagine that I thought so for a moment. Jerry dear, my best friend now, for I must not count on Roger any more, do you think I am blind? Do you think I have been blind for three years? And will you think me a romantic, conceited fool when I say that unless I—even I, a widow and a jilt, who hurt a good man terribly and got well punished for it!—can have the kind of love that you can never give me, because you gave it to someone else three years ago, I don't want to accept your generous kindness? You see, I know how you can love, Jerry, just as I see now that I never knew how Roger could until those same three years ago. Of course he didn't either—

would he ever have known the difference, I wonder, if we had married?

And there is another reason, too. You might just as well know it, for my conceit is not pride really, and it may be you know it already. Whatever love Frederick failed to kill in me—and the very idea of passionate love almost nauseates me, even yet—is not in my power to give you, Jerry dear. It might, some day, later, wake again, but it would not be your touch that could wake it.

Now, since this is so of both of us, don't you see, dear, that things are better as they are? I promise you that if I ever need help, I will come to you *first of all*, since what you really want is to help me and make me comfortable and give me the pleasure of wide travel, you generous fellow! And if ever you *really* need me, Jerry—but you won't, I am sure. No one else is quite what you are to me, or can be, now, and we must always be what we have always been—the best of friends. Tell me that you know I am right, and then let us never discuss it again.

Yours *always*,

SUE.

UNIVERSITY CLUB, May 20th, 189—

DEAR JERRY:

Have just got back from a little Western trip (my brother and I exchanged pulpits for a month) and learned of Roger's illness and the accident. What a terrible thing, and how fortunate they were! I always liked that big dog, the fine, faithful fellow. Mrs. Bradley's leaving the stage was no great surprise to me: she came to New York to ask my advice about it just before the accident. We had a long talk, and though she by no means agreed at the time to everything I said on the subject, she did not seem opposed, herself, to much of it, in fact, she seemed very anxious to do the fair thing, it seemed to me. She appreciated perfectly that the more she did in one way the less she could do in another—how wonderful it is to think that she has never been to school in her life! It almost seems as if so much schooling were unnecessary, doesn't it, when association with educated

people can do so much in three years. Or perhaps it is only women that could absorb so quickly.

I hope the doctors are wrong about her voice. They all say it will be a little husky always (though less and less so with time) and that singing, except in the quietest, smallest way, will be impossible. It does not seem to matter very much to her. She is looking very well indeed (you know, of course, that she is expecting another child in the autumn —Roger told me). He is quite magnificent with his thick, silvery hair, I think. Mr. Carter, who dined with me here at the club a night or two ago (he gave my boys a fine talk on German customs and military games) tells me that he hopes (Roger, I mean) to be able to do a great deal of his work on the Island—certainly all the summer and autumn. He seems to be turning into a sort of consulting lawyer, like a surgeon. Besides that great text-book business I suppose you know about. He says there are two or three years' work on that alone.

I hope that you agree with me that Mrs. Bradley is much better off in her husband's home, fulfilling the natural duties of her sex. You seemed to think in your last that Mrs. Paynter would not, to my great surprise. What in the world is the matter with the women, now-a-days? Where shall we be if the finest specimens of them have no leisure to perpetuate the race? Are only the stupid and unoriginal, unattractive ones to have this responsibility? I wish I dared get up a sermon on these lines; I may try yet!

You know Mrs. Paynter well, Jerry—do you think there is any chance for me there? I have been for ten years proving that a minister need not be married, and I've done it, too, but it was only because I never met the woman I wanted. I have, now, but she won't have me. Does that mean it's final? I don't know much about women, but I can't believe one like her would refuse just to be asked again. Tell me what you think. She seems very decided, though she sympathises thoroughly with my work.

Yours faithfully,
TYLER FESSENDEN ELDER.

[From My Rough Diary]

May 30, 189—

Have just written Tip Elder how sorry I am about Sue, but that he'd better give it up. She'll never marry. How curiously we three are twisted into the Bradley weaving!

M. so happy and beautiful—the past seems a dream. Voice lovely still, but not quite under her control always, and a tiny roughness in it that humanises, somehow—it was *too* clear before, though that sounds absurd.

Everybody wondering how everybody else will take her retirement. Strangely enough, no one regrets much, personally, but all sure the others will! Are we all more clear-sighted than we suppose—or more sentimental? Surgeon from Vienna has pronounced condition final. Either she is a wonderful actress or else we have over-estimated her vocation; she seems absolutely contented. And yet, think of her triumphs! And of course, her greatest successes were all to come. Madame M——is furious, but told Sue she had never trusted Roger—he was always too silent! "He has absorbed a great artist like so much blotting-paper!" she said. But he has got something into her eyes that Madame never saw there: we all agree on that. How did Alif put it—"Tis Allah sets the price, brother—we have but to pay." Well, she's paid. And old Roger, for that matter, and Sue, and Tip—and I. Who keeps the shop, I wonder?

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SUNSET END

To-day I went to Mary's wedding, and it has made me very thoughtful. She was very lovely—a great, blooming blonde, the image of Roger. They were a fine pair, as he held her on his arm: he looking younger than his sixty years, she older than her twenty, for all the children are wonderfully mature and well-developed.

She was nearly as tall as young Paynter, whose slenderness, however, is like steel. I well remember when Dr. McGee took him to North Carolina and made him over—a weak, irritable little precocity of twelve or so. He never ate or slept in a house for three years, and I think that the birds and trees of that period got into his opera and made it what it is, the musical event of a decade. He works best in Paris, and they will live there, after a honeymoon on the Island.

I don't think Mary was ever the favourite child, though each of the six thinks it is, Margarita is so wonderful with them! She cannot hide from me, who watch every light in her eye, that young Roger, the second child and oldest boy, means a shade more to her than the others, just as Roger, when he sits alone with Sue, the second daughter, talks to her more confidentially than to any of the others, and watches her yellow head most steadily when they are all swimming, off the Island wharf. They are both fine, big girls, just as Roger and my namesake are fine, big, steady fellows and little Lockwood is a fine, big, handsome child.

But my foolish old heart lost itself long ago to a pair

of slate-blue eyes set in an olive face under dark, strong waves of hair, and when into that large, blonde brood there came a perfect baby Margarita, a slender, dark thing who flashed the summer twilight sky at one from under her long dark lashes, I claimed her for mine and mine she is—my Peggy. She is alone among the others, my precious black swan: her quaint, dreamy thoughts are not their practical, sunny clear-headedness, her self-peopled, solitary wanderings are not their merry comradeships, her lovely, statuesque movements are not their athletic tumbles. She stood to-day at her mother's knee in just the attitude S——n painted them for me, her eyes clouded with awe just as the bloom upon her mother's sweeping gown of velvet clouded its elusive blue, the soft plume upon her bride-maiden's hat leaned against the rich lace on her mother's breast. How beautiful they were! As I stared at them and their eyes lighted at the same moment with just the same dear smile, so that they were more than ever wonderfully alike, I heard a woman whisper behind me that the gentleman the beautiful Mrs. Bradley and her picturesque little daughter were smiling at was the child's godfather, an old friend—all his money left to her and his namesake, her brother. Before the whisper had ended Margarita the woman had turned her eyes toward her husband—they could not leave him long that day—but Margarita the child kept hers on me, and under them the years rolled back and I seemed to see a grave young girl sitting on the sand in a faded jersey, looking down into my heart and telling me that I loved her!

How many times since have I not seen her on that beach, cradling her rosy babies in her strong, smooth arms, murmuring with her graceful daughters, judging mildly between some claim of her tall, eager sons! How many summer evenings have I sat with Peggy in my arms and watched her pace that silvering beach with her husband, hand in hand like young lovers! I think they forget utterly that Time slips by, he passes them so gently.

It is a favourite claim of ours who are bidden to that home that it is an enchanted isle, and that he only brushes it with his wings, gliding over, and turns the scythe away and holds the hour-glass steady. Even the children feel it: it is a half-jesting, half-serious plaint with them that the goats, the donkeys, and the ponies to which they successively transfer their affections can never secure immortal youth by a yearly sojourn in that happy kingdom. I offered once to rebuild our old bridge—to make it a drawbridge, even, and thus keep our treasure safe, but after a long council it was rejected.

"It wouldn't be a really island, then, you see, Jerry dear," said my Peggy (always deputed to bear an ultimatum to me) "and we like it better an island—don't you?"

Of course it must be an island! It was marked out for an island when first the waters were gathered up and the dry land appeared. I think all the happy places are islands—I should like to make one of Italy. I am convinced that when the Garden of Eden is definitely settled (and Major Upgrove is trying to persuade me to come with him to find it—he has a theory) it will be found to be a secret isle in some great estuary or arm of that ageless Eastern river suspected by the major. Surely that mysterious Apple (of whose powers Margarita was once so sceptical) never grew on any vulgar, easily-to-be-come-at mainland! No, it lurks to-day in its own island Paradise, and the angel with the flaming sword cut the land apart from all common ground so that the furrows smoked beneath it as the floods raced in. If we find it—the major and I—shall we bring some apples back to Peggy? In truth, I am none too sure. Why my darling's sex has been so eager for that Apple is not yet entirely evident—though I am not too stupidly obstinate to admit that it may be evident, one day. But the fact remains that Eve certainly regretted it, and Adam, one would suppose, must have, for he has been settling dressmaker's accounts ever since!

IT IS A FAVOURITE CLAIM OF OURS WHO ARE BIDDEN TO THAT HOME
THAT IT IS AN ENCHANTED ISLE

As to the position held by this father of mankind among the Bradley children, by the way, volumes might be written. To suppose that Barbara Jencks, their bond slave in all else, has remitted an atom of her zeal in bringing them into the state of religious conviction enjoyed by the Governour-General's family, would indicate the densest ignorance of her character. And success has not been entirely lacking, for my namesake delights in the battles of the Kings and Sue's sweet life is a very Sermon on the Mount. But Lockwood still sacrifices to Pan among the beehives and propitiates the Thunder God with favourite kittens, and Roger the Second long ago informed his would-be mentor, to her horror, that if a fellow tried to be like his father and told the truth and worked hard, he thought that fellow could take his chances with God! Dear, obstinate lad, with your cleft chin and your blue eyes, it is not your grandmother, who leaves her Emerson and her Psalms unread together, when she can fill her keen, proud eyes with you, that will deny your simple creed!

But my little Peggy has outgrown Pan, and scorns to appease her baby brother's deities.

"I asked Roger," she said to me one late afternoon, when we sat in her mother's rocky seat and watched the red sun sink, "why the sun was here—just so that we could see things? And he said yes. And the moon the same way, for night. But that little blind girl I see in the Park, in New York, *she* can't see things, Jerry dear. She never can. What is that for?"

"I can't tell, sweetheart."

"You don't know, Jerry dear?"

"No, Peggy, I don't know."

"But someone knows?"

"That I can't tell, either."

She turned her serious, deep eyes on me.

"But, Jerry dear, nothing can be that someone—*Someone*

—don't know, can it? That wouldn't be right. There must be *Some one?*"

"I hope so, sweetheart."

She stared quietly at the rosy ball that sank, below us and far away, at the rim of the sea—Margarita's sea.

"I know there is, Jerry," she said simply. "Look at that, the way I do, and you'll know, too."

And just then, I thought I did . . .

Sue was at the wedding, of course, grey, and a little worn, now, but dressed *à merveille* and delightful in her pride at her genius-boy. His sister, a wonderful, modern young woman, has learned her "trade," indeed, though one that her mother never dreamed of, and will decorate, furnish and supply with everything from ancestral portraits to patent mouse-traps any structure from a hotel to a steam-yacht that you may place in her capable, college-bred hands. A remarkable achievement is young Susan—the achievement of the *fin de siècle* generation. At the wedding-breakfast she described to me her last "job"; the putting in commission of a dilapidated fifteenth-century *château* for its new oil-king owner—he was born in a bog-cabin in Ireland and never tasted anything but potatoes and stir-about till he was fourteen. But Susan has raked Europe for a service fit for him to eat his cabbage from and Asia for rugs fit for his no longer bare feet, and has deposited his good American cheque in her bank. She is improving the occasion of her American visit by an extended hunt for old silver and brasses and china for a great country house on the Hudson—its many-millioned mistress will pay well for her "imported" treasures!

Truly is Susan a lesson to us, and wide would be her great-grandmother's eyes could she see Susan disposing of her girlish samplers and draping her camel's-hair shawl behind a Hawthorne jar. And I am bound to admit that Susan is not marrying, though her mother was struggling with two delicate children at her age. No, Susan has no

need to "marry to get away from home." As fast as this accomplished young woman establishes herself in a charming house, some envious person buys it of her, and she moves serenely to a new one, a contented, self-respecting Arab with a bank account.

Ah, well, perhaps it will be, as her mother triumphantly declares, all the more honour to the man who gets her, after all! We oldsters must not be stubborn, nowadays.

My mother, like old Mrs. Upgrove, is living still; well and happy, both of them, thank God, and as proud of their sons as if either had ever done anything to deserve it. Neither of them has much to say of Margarita, I have noticed, though both fondle her children, a little absently, perhaps, and feign to wonder what it is we see in Peggy that blinds us to the excellencies of the others—stouter children and more respectful, my dear!

And Death, that spares them both, and old Madam Bradley, too (eighty-eight now and half paralysed for nearly twenty years!), what had we done that he should take away one whom we and the world—her world—could so ill spare? Does *Someone*, indeed, know why, my sweetheart Peggy? I try to think so, but it is hard to see.

Nine years ago Harriet put Peggy into her mother's arms and praised the little thing and kissed them both, and then told Roger that she must leave them, for she felt ill and would not risk the responsibility of further nursing. She would send a good nurse straight from New York, she said, and Roger himself took her there, leaving the doctor with Margarita, as soon as he dared. He brought back the other nurse, wired me to look after Harriet, and left her comfortable in the little apartment of a good friend of hers, with a promise of a speedy return. He never saw her alive again.

Dr. McGee, even then a famous physician and devotedly attached to her, worked day and night over her, but it was useless; the over-strained, busy heart had given way and she lived only three days, growing feebler with every hour.

I was sitting beside her in the afternoon, trying to be cheerful, trying to cheer her with those futile subterfuges we are forced to, trying to get it all clear in my own troubled mind, when she smiled whimsically at me and begged me to spare myself such pain.

"A nurse is the last person to need such talk, dear Mr. Jerrolds," she whispered to me, and as the good deaconess who had been her first helper in her chosen work burst into tears and stumbled from the room, she put out her hand and I took it silently.

"What you have been—what you have been, Harriet!" I muttered unsteadily, and then her eyes met mine.

"What have I been?" her lips barely formed the words, "do you know?"

There in her soft brown eyes I saw at last—at once. God knows I never guessed before. They met mine so calmly, so honestly, so fearlessly—alas, they could be fearless now!

"And I have been such a fool—such a brute!"

"Hush! you never knew," she whispered, "you could not help it, my dear. It was so from the very first—when you saw my diary."

"But I might—I might have——"

Again she smiled whimsically.

"O no," she said quietly, "there was no chance for me, of course. I never dreamed of it, my dear. But—but I wanted you to know it. There has never been anybody but you."

I tried to speak, but could not, and again, but the words dried on my lips. Then I saw that she was sleeping—from exhaustion, probably, and sat by her in silence till the deaconess came back, red-eyed, and sent me away. I bent over her and kissed her cheek, before I left, and I am sure that her lips moved and that the hand I had held while she slept pressed mine faintly. But she did not open her eyes, and in the morning the message came

that she had drifted easily away, in that same sleep before dawn.

Gone—and I never knew, never faintly surmised, never considered!

Gone—and there had never been anybody but me!

Ah, Peggy, there had need be *Someone* that knows, to make good the pity of it, the cruelty of it, the senseless waste of it!

But we three, whom she gave so generously to each other, whom, in turn, she tended back to life, into whose lives she has grown as a tree grows, can we call her love wasted?

Nor is it among us alone that her memory flourishes. No woman in all those mountain parishes she loved so well faces her dark hour of travail without blessing her name and the name of her messengers, whom, in the endowment called in memorial of her, Margarita sends to them, to tend them and the children they bear, as Harriet helped her and hers. She lies among them, a stone's throw from the corner-stone she laid nearly twenty years ago, now, and many visitors have never seen the tablet that lies along her grave—so thick the flowers are always lying there.

"Mother says you are not to look so sad, Jerry dear, because it isn't me that Freddy's marrying!" says Peggy softly, behind me, and I come back to the present, with a jerk.

"Not Freddy, perhaps," I answer with pretended severity, "but some other young sprig no better than Freddy, and then poor old Jerry may go hang!"

She slips her firm little hand—Margarita's hand—into mine shyly.

"Now, Jerry, how silly you are!" she says, looking carefully to see if I am teasing her or by any chance in earnest.

"How can I marry a young sprig, when I am going to marry you?"

"Since when?" I inquire sardonically.

"Why, Jerry!"

Her big eyes open wide, she plants herself before me and stares accusingly.

"You know very well—you can't have forgotten? You and I and little Jerry and Miss Jencks are going round the world when I am sixteen! To Japan, and see the wistaria and the cherry blossoms and the five hundred little stone Buddha-gods that get all wet with spray and the red bridge nobody may walk on!"

"Anywhere else?"

"Yes, to Vevay and see where Mr. Boffin used to live and old Joseph that told you when you were all grown big and went back,

"*C'est moi, Monsieur, qui suis Joseph: j' ai nettoyé les premières bottes de Monsieur!*' "

How well I remember those first formidable boots, and my manly feelings when I clumped them down in the hall before my door for Joseph to clean! Jerry and Peggy and I are going over every foot of the old grounds—the school, where the little fellows still sport their comfortable, round capes; the way, well trodden still, I'll wager, to the old *patisserie* with its tempting windows of indigestible joys; the natatorium where we dived like frogs; the English church where we learned the Collects and eyed the young ladies' school gravely till it blushed individually and collectively; the famous field where I fought the grocer's boy who cried "*à bas les Anglais!*" three days running. (He beat me, incidentally.)

I find that all the old memories come back very sweetly: I had a happy childhood, on the whole, one that never lacked love and sympathy. Believe me, ye parents, who think that these days will soon be forgotten, they make a difference, these idle memories, and life is inexpressibly richer if those early days are rich in pleasant little adventures and cheery little experiences, cheerily shared! I have more to remember than Roger, whose early boyhood was, though far wealthier than mine, strangely poorer from

the lack of just this mellow glow over and through it.

And Margarita's? We shall never know what filled those silent, childish hours of hers, alone with the dogs and the gulls. Her quaint lonely games, her towers of sand and shell, her musings by the tide, her dreams on the sun-warmed rocks—I fancy I see them all in watching Peggy. She cannot tell herself.

"I began to live," she says, "when I met Roger."

"You have lived a great deal, since, have you not, Margarita?" I say, a little wistfully, perhaps, she is so splendid and so complete, and one seems so broken and colourless and middle-aged beside her.

"A great deal. Yes, I suppose so," she answers, and her eye rests quickly but surely on Roger, on each of the yellow heads, then on the dark one, and then, at last, on me.

"You have given up a great deal for those handsome heads, Margarita," I go on, under the spur of some curious impulse, "did you never regret it? You had the world at your feet, Madame used to say, and you gave it up . . ."

She looks at me with the only eyes in the world that can make me forget Peggy's, and gives me both her hands (one with a flashing, cloudy star sapphire burning on it) in that free, lovely gesture so characteristic of her.

"Don't, Jerry!" she says in her sweet, husky voice, and Roger hearing it, turns slightly from his guests and gives her a swift, strong look. The gay wedding crowd melts away, the clatter of the wine-glasses is the wash of pebbles on the beach, her hand in mine seems wet with flying spray, as she speaks in that rich, vibrating voice, for me alone:

"I had the world at my feet—yes, Jerry dear, and I nearly lost it, did I not? I did not know, you see. And I have it now, Jerry, I have it now!" (O, Susan of the bank account, who need not marry to get away from home, will that look come to your eyes and glow there till your face

is too bright for an elderly bachelor to bear? Indeed, I hope it may!)

"There is only one world for a woman, Jerry," says Margarita softly, "and no one can be happy, like me, till she lives in it—the hearts that love her. His and theirs—and yours, dear Jerry, O always yours!"

His and Theirs and Mine!

Amen to that, my dear, and surely if there is *Someone* that knows, He knows that what you say is true!

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